

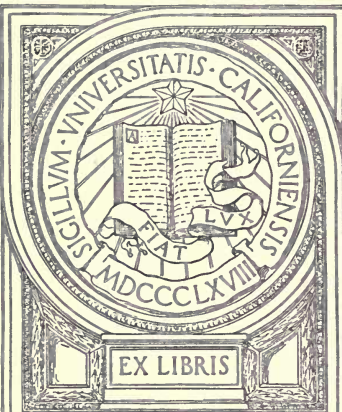
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THE  
ANATOMY OF SOCIETY.

BY  
JAMES AUGUSTUS ST. JOHN.

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Γινῶθι σεαυτὸν.

ORACLE OF DELPHI.

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VOL. I.

LONDON:

EDWARD BULL, HOLLES STREET.

1831.

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REV. HOBART CAUNTER, B. D.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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It will quickly be perceived that a part only of the original design has been filled up in these volumes. Society is, as it were, a vast continent, over which we must travel long and far, before we can paint its aspect, or exactly determine its configuration. Of this extensive and varied region, which has already occupied so many superior observers, and furnished materials for so infinite a variety of sublime or beautiful pictures, I have hitherto examined but a portion ; but such opportunities for observation as have been afforded me by Providence, I have endeavoured to turn to advantage ; perusing mankind with a kindly spirit, no less desirous of strengthening and extending my sympathies, than of purifying and enlarging the number of my ideas. Whether those speculations, which have been a source of much delight to me, can be of any utility to others, it is not in my power to determine ; but in general such ideas as

spring, without any soliciting, spontaneously from the soul, are apt to produce the same kind of satisfaction in the minds which receive as in the minds which engendered them. If this position hold good in my case, I shall be without apprehension.

With respect to the continuation, or further developement of the design here commenced, I am unable to speak with positiveness, all human schemes depending mainly upon something exterior to the will; but if the requisite leisure be afforded me, it is my intention to examine, in a separate work, the frame and structure of Asiatic society, as well as those forms of social order which prevailed in the ancient world. Meanwhile the present production is complete in itself, as far, I mean, as my opportunities enabled me to render it so.

It is proper to state here, that many separate portions of the work have already appeared in periodical publications.

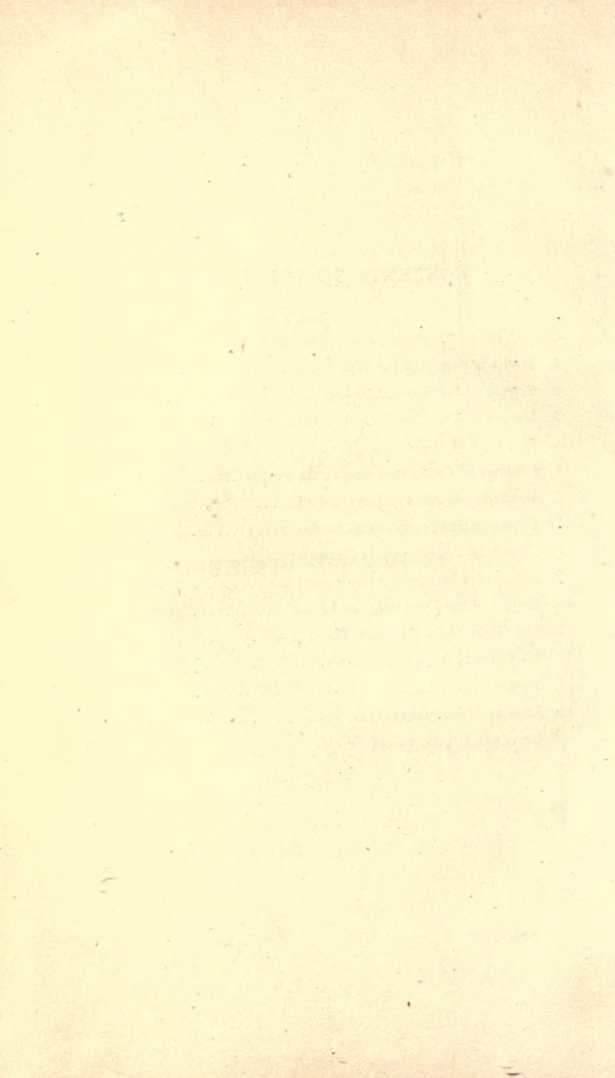
PARIS,  
December 30, 1830.

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**MODES**  
**OF**  
**STUDYING THE WORLD.**

2 VOL. I.

B



# ANATOMY OF SOCIETY,

&c.

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## CHAP. I.

### MODES OF STUDYING THE WORLD.

IT must be evident that authors necessarily make a number of observations on life and manners, for which, when thrown together, it is exceedingly difficult to find any suitable title. This induces many to prefix to their speculations the most extraordinary epigraphs ; and these, at first sight, appear to confer an air of originality, of which, however, they are very far from being an infallible token. Reflecting on these circumstances, it has always appeared much better to us, to place common inscriptions at the head of our disquisitions, and to reserve what little ingenuity we might possess to be infused into the body of the piece. Subjects are not infinite, but they may be infinitely

varied by the manner of treating of them. Therefore, although it be now impossible to speak of things that have never been spoken of before, it seems to be still in our power to make new reflections on topics apparently familiar, but, for that very reason, little heeded or understood.

The cause why men visit each other and converse, abstracting all considerations of business, seems to be simply the love of pleasure. This is the passion truly universal ; this is the pivot upon which the world intellectual, as well as the world of sense, turns. Philosophers and saints feel it in their speculations and devotions, and yield to it too, in their way, as completely as the Sybaritish gourmand, whose stomach is his Baal and Ashtaroth. Nor is this at all surprising, in reality, for the gratification of this passion is *happiness*—a gem for which all the world search, and but few find.

From the first institution of society, however, mankind have always been persuaded that happiness is a god that cannot be approached singly. Through this belief, indeed, we have congregated into nations, built cities, invented public worship, formed ourselves into clubs distinguished by particular opinions or costumes, instituted marriage, and desired children. We have, and can have, no conception of independent, solitary being. Even

God, whom we have fashioned, as Aristotle observes, after our own image, is believed to have surrounded himself with the society of angels, and to delight in the songs and praises of these inferior and dependent spirits. And as to man, he is so little capable of entire solitude, that if cast by shipwreck alone on some desolate island, he would part with every other advantage under heaven in exchange for a companion. We have no enjoyment whatever from which all idea of other beings is excluded. Nothing beginning and ending in self. The presence, therefore, of other beings of our own species is delightful to us all; and if we love to retire occasionally into solitude, it is not for the purpose of segregating ourselves from mankind, or from any antipathy we indulge for company and conversation, but because we hope, during our temporary absence, to enlarge and perfect our powers of pleasing, that we may return to the circle of our friends more rich in the materials and science of happiness. Society, indeed, is man's proper sphere; solitude his aversion, and his bane. And if learned men, forgetting the aim of study, contract, sometimes, a fondness for loneliness and musing, they soon become conscious of indulging an unnatural propensity; and either grow to despise mankind, to think disdainfully of their hopes and fears, or sink into a timid, feeble



distrustfulness of their own powers, and shun society from mere dread. Every kind of learning has a natural tendency to create effeminacy of character, because it has a tendency to enfeeble the physical structure. On this account much attention is paid, in every good system of education, to the development of our bodily powers, which, as all real philosophers have inculcated, exert a much stronger influence on the character of our minds than mere learned men have ever been able to comprehend. But the mind itself has its gymnastic exercises as well as the body; exercises, without which it is almost impossible to acquire that amplitude and intrepidity of intellect, which a great writer of our own times regards as the distinguishing attributes of genius. These gymnastics are, conversation and argument. No one, however, we hope, will imagine that we mean to dignify with the name of conversation the silly nonsensical chit-chat which generally prevails in society. Our intention is far different; nothing appears to us to deserve the name but that free manly interchange of ideas, which takes place among friends. Time may be consumed by the hour in gratifying that childish vanity which loves to hear its own voice; but, surely, we do not call such abuse of words, conversation. We are afraid that Dr. Johnson, the greatest talker of modern times, not

excepting Mr. Coleridge himself, had a vicious theory on this subject. He was himself the great catholic church, in his own eyes, and every deviation from his creed was heresy. To his ear, the growl of triumph which he uttered over an antagonist vanquished in argument, was far sweeter than the note of the nightingale. His meat and drink was contention; nothing but that could rouse his sluggish nature into any thing like ecstasy. He was an intellectual gladiator, animated and cheered in combat by the applause and acclamation of that miniature amphitheatre in which he always brandished his syllogisms. But it was this that made him what he was. Like certain voluptuaries that must approach pleasure through the avenues of pain, Johnson reached the goal of his ambition through the buffetings of passionate and contentious argument. Dr. Parr, too, celebrated for his conversational talents and careless wig, was partial to the amphitheatral style, and seems to have vehemently loved to nonplus an ignoramus. Perhaps the most striking thing in his conversation, however, was the contrast observed between the liberality of his opinions and the strict orthodoxy of his wig and gown. People did not expect to find those clerical ringlets, and that dark symbol of the ecclesiastical spirit, serving as a covering to republican independence, and uni-

versal tolerance; the tree looked sombre and forbidding, but, to the surprise of the searcher, it bore golden fruit. This was the feature which chiefly arrested attention in the character of Dr. Parr; and further than this, he does not appear to have differed much from other very learned men. We are inclined to yield a much higher credence to the stories told of Mr. Coleridge's household or fireside eloquence; his writings indicate this sort of talent. Bright, fanciful, but flagging suddenly, as if from want of stimulus, his genius seems formed by nature for detached efforts, springing out of immediate enjoyment. The questions, objections, replies, rejoinders of conversation, are as so many steps upon which his mind mounts up and soars away into sublimity; otherwise, like the flying-fish, it makes short bounds, and sinks again upon the surface.

If we may credit the relations of ancient writers, Socrates possessed the powers of dialectic eloquence beyond any man that ever lived. There seemed to be some spell in his language; it attracted like the songs of the syrens. Persons who had once heard it, immediately grew attached to his person, burned incessantly to hear him speak; walked with him, lived with him, or purchased a few hours of his company at the peril of their lives. Yet, undoubtedly,

this plain old man affected no peculiar splendour of style. His language did not glitter, like a coronation robe, with metaphors; it was only exquisitely natural. The most remarkable feature, perhaps, in his conversation, was his amazing versatility, or that readiness with which he entered on the particular arts or professions in which those with whom he happened to converse were engaged. With the lover, he could converse of love; with the jurisconsult, of law; with the statuary, of sculpture; with the gardener, of plants and trees; with the painter, of pictures; with the general, of war; with the politician, of government; and he spoke not merely to draw out his companion, whoever he might be; but evinced, during the colloquy, a thorough acquaintance with the art or mystery under consideration. No doubt he owed much of this facility and extensive knowledge of human concerns, to his practice of frequenting the workshops and manufactories of the city, as well as the forum, the courts of law, the haunts of philosophers, and the tables of the great. But it was by no means his superior knowledge which communicated that incomparable flavour to his conversation; for numbers have possessed much more knowledge than Socrates: but some peculiar and lofty kind of wisdom, which, when

clothed in words, appeared to elevate the mind of the auditor as well as of the speaker—which is the summit of eloquence. Many speakers, as well as writers, appear to affect an air of superiority over the persons they address, by which, if they sometimes excite our admiration, they lose our love, which we bestow on none but those who are willing to treat with us on terms of equality. The monarchical principle, odious in every point of view, is insufferable in conversation. There, every man is a democrat; thinks himself entitled to make his voice heard; and that immediately, and not by proxy. The warmth of argument levels all distinctions; and so soon as an individual calls in the aid of his dignity to support his positions, he is thought to have infringed the laws of social intercourse. A positive dogmatical style may be indulged more safely by any one than by a man in power; for, while in other persons it appears to be merely the effect of temperament, in the prince or great man it seems to imply a secret reference to his authority, and often engenders deadly hatred and animosity. Napoleon understood this; for, although often hurried into excessive warmth by the impetuosity of his character, he always seems to have been anxious to repair, by concession and apology, any breach of good manners of which



he had been guilty. Arguing one day with Bertrand, who obstinately maintained his opinion, though it seems to have been quite erroneous, Napoleon exclaimed, "Bah! c'est impossible!" "Oh!" says Bertrand, "if that is the way in which you mean to talk, there is an end of all argument:" the great man felt the reproof, and exerted all his ingenuity to mollify the anger of his follower.

The persons who shine most in conversation are, perhaps, those who attack established opinions and usages; for there is a kind of splendid Quixotism in standing up, even in the advocating of absurdity, against the whole world. The same principle holds good in authorship. No one is astonished or startled at seeing the things which are believed by every body defended, however ingeniously; but let some daring speculator venture to call in question the universal opinion, and all ears are erected to listen. People imagine, and in most cases imagine truly, that the intellect which amid the stream of popular prejudices can resist the current, and repose firmly on itself, must be great as well as extraordinary. To command considerable attention, therefore, either in writing or talking, a man must hazard bold thoughts, bold figures, and unusual expressions. This was Lord Byron's theory: he perceived that the literary appetite of

the public, over-clogged with common sweets, was beginning to flag, and he determined to awaken it again with pungent sauces and high-seasoned ragouts. Thus sailors, grown drowsy through fatigue and long watching, often contrive to keep each other awake at night upon the ocean, by repeating fearful tales of shipwreck; and by painting, in their rude but strong expressions, the hardships and horrors to which their manner of life is peculiarly subject. The vulgar, too, on land, sitting up late, to watch over the dead or the sick, scare away sleep by ghost-stories and relations of murder, which usually grow more awful and atrocious as the night advances. Precisely in the same manner, the apathy of excessive civilization, forestalling a feature of returning barbarism, is only to be roused by the paradoxical, the tremendous, or the supernatural.

Perhaps, if we made the most of it, conversation might be a better nursery of popular ideas than reading. What every body talks of must be interesting to every body; but we can never know exactly what people employ their minds upon unless we converse with them. From conversation with the world we learn its wants; but it is by conversing assiduously with our own thoughts that we discover how to supply them. There are some few subjects, however, which we

may know, *à priori*, will always please—immortal theses, upon which the wit of man can never be exercised in vain. Do we imagine, when we open some new treatise on Love, that the author has discovered a fresh vein, and mined more deeply than all former adventurers? Not at all: we know very well that the little god has already usurped all beautiful epithets, all soft expressions, all bewitching sounds; and the utmost we expect from the skill of the writer is, that he has thrown all these together, so as to produce a new picture. Love is immortal, and does not grow wrinkled because we and our expressions fade. His heart is still as joyous and his foot as light as when he trod the green knolls of Paradise with Eve. He will be young when he sits upon the grave of the thousandth generation of our posterity, listening to the beating of his own heart, or sporting with his butterfly consort, as childishly as if he were no older than the daisy under his foot. His empire is a theme of which the tongue never grows weary, or utters all that seems to come quivering and gasping to the lips for utterance. We think, more than we ever spoke, of love; and if we have a curiosity when we first touch some erotic volume, it is to see whether the author has embodied our unutterable feelings, or divulged what we have never dared.

Demosthenes and Cicero, and many others, we dare say, since them, were in the habit of converting the subjects they heard discussed in conversation, into theses. The thunder-tongued Athenian, we are told, whose periods afterwards convulsed Greece through all her states, condescended in his youth to chronicle the arguments of ordinary men; labouring, however, to improve what he had heard, in thought and expression; sifting every word, weighing every syllable; pouring his fire and his soul into every metaphor. Cicero's themes were chiefly, if not entirely, of a political nature, and written, not so much to exercise his pen, as to call off his mind from disagreeable reflections. Nor were they composed during his youth, when such exercises are most useful, but after he had gone through all the public honours of the state, and had seen his country enslaved by the least tyrannical of all tyrants. Locke's 'Essay on the Human Understanding' arose out of a casual conversation; and, perhaps, the most fashionable essays of the present day are little more than the echoes of the familiar chit-chat of a certain coterie.

As fine conversation is eloquence subdued in tone and broken into dialogue, the same characteristics belong to both. We always wish, when we discourse, to pour our opinions and sentiments

into the mind of our companion, to the exclusion of his own; and in proportion to the value we set on his friendship and judgment is the vehemence of our efforts to obtain his suffrage in our favour. It is for this reason that warm language, in debate, seldom gives offence; perhaps never, when both disputants are men of superior understanding. We consider the eagerness of our antagonist to beat down our arguments as a proof that he feels their weight, and attributes power to the mind that wields them. And this, however he may chafe and fume in the utterance of it, is a most unequivocal compliment to our abilities. Sneering and irony, exhibiting on the other hand an affectation of superiority, are generally abhorred. But they are figures of speech which wound the mind that handles them much oftener than they lead to victory. Very powerful intellects resort to them but rarely, unless it be to abate the insolence of coxcombry, or to pour the laugh of a company on presumptuous ignorance; and for this purpose they were employed by Socrates against the Sophists. They poison, however, the kindliness of conversation, provoking all parties to put on their most desperate weapons, and changing the friendly contention of the palæstra into the fierce struggles of the field of battle. Warmth of manner, and vehemence of voice and gesture, enliven conversa-

tion, as we have observed, when they degenerate not into rudeness and intemperance. They are the signs, too, of great singleness of heart, and earnestness of purpose; and their presence or absence was frequently turned, by the old orators, into an argument in favour or disparagement of the narratives or asseverations they accompanied. We are told by Plutarch, that a man coming to Demosthenes one day, and desiring him to be his advocate against a person from whom he had suffered by assault: "Not you, indeed," said the orator, "you have suffered no such thing." "What! said the man, raising his voice, "have I not received those blows?" "Aye, now," replied Demosthenes, "you speak like a person that has been really injured." Cicero, who left few fine thoughts in all the literature that had preceded him untouched or unadorned by his pen, introduced a splendid amplification of this idea into one of his pleadings. It was that which he pronounced in defence of Q. Gallius, accused by the orator Calpurnius of an attempt to poison him. According to his own description, the style of this speaker was pure and beautiful, but void of vehemence and energy; it delighted the ear and charmed the understanding, but it threw no fire among the trains of passion. It gave light, like the moon, but it was cold. Such a style of speaking suited



not vehement accusation; and though, on the occasion in question, he had to describe an attempt upon his own life, his habitual manner underwent no very visible alteration. He told his story clearly and elegantly, but without passion or energy. Yet, although this was his natural style, which he could not, under any circumstances, be expected to change materially, Cicero deduced from it a powerful argument in invalidation of his charge. "Is this an affair, Calidius," said he, "in which you would behave yourself thus, if you were in earnest? Would you, with that eloquence, which has so frequently been exerted for the benefit of others, neglect your own cause? Where is your affliction? Where that passion which extorts words and complaints even from the ineloquent? I see in you no perturbation, either of mind or of body; you strike not your forehead, you lay not your hand upon your heart; nor (which is the most ordinary symptom of passion) do you even stamp upon the ground with your foot. Nay, so far are you from having shaken us with emotion, that we were in danger of falling asleep during your harangue!"

Action in conversation, as in oratory, sometimes conceals the absence of more lofty qualities; the eye, charmed with a succession of passionate and graceful movements, prejudices the case, and

hinders the mind from dwelling coolly on the language and sentiments which these movements were only meant to render more impressive. There is enchantment, too, in a mellow musical voice, which often gives to very ordinary discourse the effect of eloquence. Speaking, in his work on great orators, of the various excellencies of the speakers of old Rome, Cicero characterizes Cn. Lentulus as a pleader who gained by action only the reputation of an orator; "concealing," says he, "beneath his striking movements, the mediocrity and barrenness of his genius." It is, no doubt, great merit to be able successfully to hide, under graceful gesture, sweetness of voice, or copiousness of language, the natural meanness and poverty of one's thoughts; it is much greater, however, not to need these painted screens.

There undoubtedly is great persuasive power in the countenance, independent of words. A picture or a statue, representing man or woman, regarded attentively, has a very strong influence upon the spectator's state of mind. When it is clothed with bland sweet looks, the person contemplating it will involuntarily adjust his own features into the same kind of expression, and adopt the smile of the stone or canvas. In gazing stedfastly at the Venus and Adonis of Titian, we have often detected our own countenance relaxing

into the softness and alluring fondness of the goddess, and, an instant after, into the gentle reproachfulness of the youthful hunter, delayed for a moment by her tenderness from his favourite sport. Turning round, too, to observe the effect of the same picture upon the fair portion of the spectators, we think we have remarked that the most lovely women looked still more lovely as they meditated, enrapturedly, on that Queen of Beauty, clinging in disordered earnestness to the departing object of her affections. On the other hand, beholding the face and form of Hercules or Jupiter, we insensibly give to our muscles a strenuous or sublime expression, answerable to the loftiness of the emotion which the image excites within our soul. Nay, the casual glance of a countenance, caught in passing through the street, has the power to influence our looks and musings; gentleness and benignity inducing a soft and pleasing expression and tone of mind, and gloom and sternness the reverse.

But if beauty, attacking us in this flying Parthian manner, have so much power, it is perfectly irresistible when drawn up in array against us, face to face. Reason then opposes it in vain. Something mysterious seems to emanate from the features as the words are uttered, and, though the mere attribute of form, to mingle with the sounds

of the voice, and render them enchanting. Perhaps considerations of sex, however obscure and remote, may insinuate themselves into all the pleasures which beauty inspires; and assist in conferring on sounds and phrases a charm beyond the force of eloquence. Lips steeped in loveliness can never fail, whoever be the auditors, to coin sweet bewitching words, and send them like arrows to the heart. Language assumes a new nature in the mouth of beauty. It grows feminine; purifies itself from the stains of art; and is then most invincible, when throwing off all pomp and metaphor, it appears naked, like Love. We imagine Cleopatra must have lisped Greek most divinely. Her words borrowed melody from her eyes, and must have seemed full of honey, and rich overflowing gracefulness, because the lips from which they fluttered were so unmatched in softness and beauty. Perhaps there are persons to whom this kind of thinking may seem unintelligible. They might better understand old Montaigne's illustration of the nature of the logic of circumstances. He thought robes, ermine, and badges of authority, exceedingly great helps in conversation; like the old Roman, who was of opinion that it was very absurd to argue with a man who commanded thirty legions. But beauty, and power, which is generally the handmaid of beauty, have much the

same effect on the human mind : both subdue it, render it submissive, blind, cringing, fawning, flattering. Who is there that has not observed, in his own case or in his neighbour's, some few poor unmeaning syllables, borrowing tenderness, force, or sublimity from the bright eyes that presided, like stars, over their birth? As to the eloquence of rank or office, of court dresses and lawn sleeves, it is a topic too stale, we fear, to bear mention. But it may be predicated generally, that those buds of rhetoric which put forth upon the stock either of beauty or of power are apt to fade very rapidly when thrown for a moment into the shade, and defy all future showers to give them their bloom again. The jest of an ex-minister is as flavourless as a mummy; as unintelligible as its hieroglyphical epitaph. Three days after his fall, his wit, under the sponge of oblivion, has grown as much a mystery as the name of him who built the pyramid, or the taste of Lot's wife.

The wit and conversation that are relished for their own sake, are those of equals. We soon grow weary of condescension or of condescending, and long for that freedom which prevails only among "birds of a feather." It is pleasant enough to watch familiarity feeling its way among the doubtfulness of new associations; now making a

slight advance ; now retreating ; watching the gleams of character bursting out from behind the studied folds of etiquette ; treading softly on prejudices or failings ; now congratulating itself ; now despairing. But the mind is never easy until it meets associates in broad daylight ; when the failings and peculiarities of each are perfectly known ; and when few or no thoughts remain in the breast that might not be suffered to venture over the lips.

When this is the case, conversation is in some respects more valuable than books : for men often hazard, in friendly familiar intercourse, expressions and remarks which they would hesitate to put upon paper, either because they might consider them too dangerous or bold, or, though useful, too common. Besides, men love to converse about the subjects with which they are best acquainted ; they frequently prefer writing about what they wish, or would be thought, to understand. The most ordinary company may convict a person of ignorance, if he presumes to talk of things unknown to him ; but it is not so easy to interrogate an author on the meaning of his book. When Hobbes was at any time at a loss for arguments to defend his unsocial principles, *vivá voce*, he always used to say—"I have published my opinions ; consult my works ; and, if I am wrong,

confute me publicly." To most persons this mode of confutation was by far too operose ; but they might have confoundedly puzzled the philosopher in verbal disputation.

Men are social or otherwise in proportion as their sources of happiness are more or less common. Happiness is self-satisfaction, however produced. If an individual, therefore, be so constituted that he can draw advantageous comparisons between himself and others in most cases, he is sure to be generally happy ; and as this can be done best in solitude, where the virtues and enjoyments of others dwindle almost to nothing in the distance, while their own appear in all their magnitude, seclusion is the paradise of proud minds, divested of power, an attribute that always enables a man to make those comparisons which, no secret remorse preventing, constitute happiness. Others, whom no self-flattery short of fatuity can vest with great qualities, seek in noise and bustle for happiness. If they are inferior, they wish to forget it. They mingle with jovial companions, parasites of the bowl, fellows whom Bacchus makes equal. With these the instruments of bliss are delirium and forgetfulness ; as with that Arabian prince, who, having neither a Shakspeare nor a Milton to lift his fancy above "the visible diurnal sphere," was fain to take up with opium,



which transported him, he said, in delicious trance, to the Indies, and, amid the burning desert, refreshed his fancy with shady forests and meadows and cooling springs.

Perhaps the surest way to gain a correct idea of the value of conversation, would be, to study and compare together the modes of it which have prevailed respectively among civilized and barbarous nations. The old Egyptian was a devout worshipper of silence and of onions; the Greek was loquacious, but he wrote *Iliads*, and spoke *Philippics*; the Roman, too, loved to hear the echo of his own voice; the modern Gaul and the modern Briton are by no means dumb; while the Huron, the Spaniard, the Cherokee, the Brahmin, the Turk, and the Monk of Mount Athos, hate words, and will sometimes ponder whole days with their eyes fixed, their lips closed, and their ideas bound up, as in a frost. Barbarians are taciturn, because they have nothing to say; or, if they do talk, their discourse generally amounts to nothing. But civilized nations, who are continually adding to their intellectual stock, have many motives for avoiding silence: they would learn, and would show that they have learned something; and, from these concurring causes, are seldom sparing of their words. But, as concomitance is liable to be mistaken for causation,

it is sometimes inferred from this, that a nation's fondness for conversation is the reason of its intellectual greatness. It is, however, only the effect. The arts are created before we talk of the arts. The birth of eloquence preceded that of rhetoric. When the sciences and the arts have made some progress, however, among a people, they undoubtedly lend their aid in enlarging and purifying the style of conversation. Among the Greeks and Romans, the tone even of the most familiar discourse was very much modified by the constant presence of statues, pictures, vases, urns, and gems. We find them making perpetual reference, even in their most homely dialogues, to the pictures of Parrhasius, Protogenes, or Apelles ; or to the statues of Phidias, Myron, or Lysippus. This arose from the public manner in which the productions of the chisel and the pencil were exhibited. It was even thought bad taste at Athens, in the time of Socrates, to make a private collection of pictures ; which might be seen to so much more advantage on the sacred walls of the public temples, mingled with associations of the gods. We bid fair, at present, to rival the Athenians in liberality, for the magnificent and costly galleries of our rich men, and even of our Kings, begin to be laid open to the public eye, to enrich our fancy

and to enliven our conversation. There can be little doubt but that at first both Venuses and Apollos will be criticised with more affectation than judgment; but experience will correct this evil, and lead us, from indiscriminating admiration or ignorant censure, to a more chaste and enlarged apprehension of what is great and of what is beautiful.

But, after all, is conversation to be preferred to books? Montaigne, who is fond of paradoxes, maintains that it is, and so did Plato before him. "The study of books," says the former, "is a languid, feeble motion, that does not warm; whereas conversation at once instructs and exercises." We differ with him. Writing, in our opinion, is the only means by which a philosopher can converse with all those who deserve to hear him. His friendly circle must always, in a great measure, be collected round him by chance; he cannot choose who shall be his brothers; seldom who shall be his friends. Besides, be his intimates ever so well disposed to hear him, he cannot be always speaking; he must sleep, eat, meditate, be idle, die. Nothing, however, can stop the mouth of his book, which can always be made to speak to as many as desire it, at once, and at all hours. Though no one who is indisposed needs hear it, it

is always eloquent ; is subject to no sickness, no want, no old age. It is an immortal oracle. To converse with the living may, we grant, be more pleasant ; but we regard it as much more useful to hold frequent and assiduous converse with the dead.



**SCIENCE**  
**OF**  
**FORTUNE AND POWER.**





## CHAP. II.

### SCIENCE OF FORTUNE AND POWER.

I cannot sufficiently marvel that this part of knowledge, touching the several characters of natures and dispositions, should be omitted both in morality and policy; considering it is of so great ministry and suppeditation to them both.—**LORD BACON.**

**I**N every pursuit into which a man can be led by his necessities or passions, his means of success will be exactly proportioned to his knowledge of character. Not but that there are instances daily occurring of men who acquire power or wealth by mere accident, without their having any pretensions to this knowledge. But as no man can rationally calculate upon having his wishes fulfilled in such a god-send manner, and as no wise or great man would wish it, knowledge of character, the only instrument of success upon which we can rely, appears to deserve cultivation. Men of the world, in whatever kind of affairs or business

they may be engaged, from the management of a shop or counting-house, up to the direction of a government, stand eminently in need of this knowledge; and the few adventurers who raise themselves to distinction and rank in the state, will be found upon inquiry to have owed their advancement entirely to it. It is, therefore, the grand science of fortune-making. This being the case, it seems very astonishing that so little has been done to facilitate the acquiring and perfecting of this science, which holds the golden keys of fortune and power, and affords a still greater benefit, the means of living serenely and independently without either.

By studying the virtues and defects of others, a prudent man will be induced to reflect upon his own character; for he will perceive that the effect produced upon mankind by his exertions must inevitably correspond to their fitness no less than to their energy. As few, however, can be found possessed of sufficient courage to dissect and acknowledge to themselves their own weaknesses, for we all love to believe ourselves perfect, the knowledge of character is seldom acquired, and may in fact be looked upon, almost exclusively, as the science of great men. It may seem strange, since men, the elements of this knowledge, are perpetually in the presence of each other, that it

should notwithstanding be so little common. But there are many impediments. For men, to whom study is habitual, most commonly choose a retired life, and speculate upon humanity from too great a distance; thus they never acquire even the elements, and their reasoning on this subject, for the most part, is cold and common-place. Men of business, on the other hand, have their faculties stunned by approaching the great machine of life too near; they indeed step into it, and are hurried along so rapidly that they have no time for observation. Subtile and acute reasoners, who unite experience with talent, frequently err, likewise, through their attempting to explain all human actions by one simple principle. Numbers decide inaccurately through an over-weening confidence in their capacity to judge at first sight; many through a habit of judging of others by themselves. These reasons of failure belong to the observers; there are others in the complexion and nature of the study. For men of evil dispositions are most careful to throw a veil over their natures, knowing it to be every body's interest that they should be discovered, but for their own that they remain concealed. Even the weak and trifling exert all their energies to hide the defects of their character, come prepared to exhibit themselves in company, and pick their phrases and

plume their actions with all the art they possess. In business, men view each other with mutual distrust. In their pleasures, they feel or affect a recklessness and magnanimity which form no part of their character. Some are close in their dealings and prodigal in their pleasures; others the reverse; and many appear to act conformably to no rule whatever.

It is in the nature of the study, that one man can have but limited observation of another; that the tide of business and conversation should carry a man out of his drift, and make him a *spectacle* rather than a *spectator*. Therefore no one can properly be said to study the characters of men who mingles sincerely in their pleasures, or partakes in any great degree of their solitudes, or is immersed in affairs, or attaches great value to present matters; for in all these predicaments he will want that coolness and self-possession which are necessary to study of every kind.—To understand a man's character, it is necessary to observe very frequently the conflict between his passions and his intellect, and to calculate on which side victory most generally declares itself; for his nature is a thousand-sided figure, which cannot be viewed completely from any one position, but must be contemplated by the lamp of occasion on every side, if we would

comprehend it thoroughly. Horace speaks with commendation of kings—

—— who never chose a friend

Till with full bowls they had unmasked his soul,

And seen the bottom of his deepest thoughts.

But much dependence cannot be placed upon what is wrung out of a man under the influence of wine, which does not so much unveil as it disarranges our ideas; and, therefore, whoever contemplates the character from the combination of ideas produced by intoxication, views man in a false light. Violent anger has nearly the same effect as wine. Voltaire is said to have remarked, that no man is a hero to his valet. There is more wit than truth in the observation, unless the valet be a dolt. Whoever is possessed of real greatness, and is not a hero by complaisance, will lose nothing by being contemplated in the relations and accidents of domestic life; but, on the contrary, will gain upon the imagination by allowing the observer many casual glimpses into the heart when it is under the influence of the most ennobling affections. It is a vulgar error to consider a man humiliated by being contemplated under pain, or sickness, or any grievous calamity, or even in the exercise of the meanest function of our nature; for they who think, know before-hand, that the latter must be performed; and in the former, there

is always too much of the terrible or the solemn to allow of the existence of contempt. It is only when a man gives way under pains, which include no idea of danger, that he appears weak: a secret sentiment that they are subject to the like contingencies will keep up, in serious disorders, the respect of the by-standers. But although the character be much under the eye of domestics, it may be doubted that "*verior fama è domesticis emanat.*" Relations, and persons who live together, unless they be very extraordinary people, have very seldom any enlarged knowledge of each other's character. They rather instinctively conform to than understand one another; and pursue the thread of each other's affections and desires, as a blind man finds his way through streets to which he has been accustomed. They who live in London are much less observing of its beauties and peculiarities than strangers; the greatest things in it have been subdued by familiarity to common-place in their imaginations; and, therefore, their ideas of those things are very incorrect. In this way, Voltaire's hero might appear little in the eyes of his valet; but the defect would be in the valet's eyes.

Cupid was painted blind by the ancients, to signify that the affections prevent the sight, not so much from perceiving outward as inward de-

fects. They even obscure perfections and beauties of character, which are not their immediate object, or whose existence might be a bar to their progress or continuance. A man, conscious of many glaring defects in his own mind or person, would dissemble to himself his mistress's discernment and good sense, because, to dwell on them, would be to view the unpleasant side of his prospects, which a man in love is seldom apt to do. This, *secundum majus et minus*, may be said of all persons who live affectionately together; and, therefore, a man's family are not the best judges of his character.

Nor can any correct judgment of the character be formed from conversation; for men of strong passions are commonly too much interested, men of weak, too little, to be known by what they say. Plutarch relates of Brutus, as a proof of his sagacity, that he proposed to some of his friends the question of tyrannicide in the abstract; and by the manner in which they reasoned concerning it, decided whether or not he should associate them in his enterprise against Cæsar. It was hazarding much, if he trusted to their mere approval or condemnation; for although one might decide for excluding from such an undertaking a man who should condemn it in the abstract, he ought not, perhaps, conversely, to admit any one who should approve



of it; for the action might appear so noble and so virtuous to the imagination, while merely contemplating the abstract proposition, that a man could do no otherwise than admire it, but his energy might fail in action. For to know how a man will act, it is not enough to observe how he can reason. Brutus, however, knew in many other ways the men he had to deal with.

But even actions themselves bespeak not the character infallibly. Our natures are often so curbed and constrained by circumstances, and impelled by the general habits of the times, that we seldom appear to be what we are. Indeed it may almost be said, that the character a man gains by his actions in society is never his real character; for what he does, flows from the fashions of the age, from his position, from the influence of others, and is no manner of rule by which to judge how he would conduct himself the next moment, were he removed to a new scene. It is well known that men sometimes feel appetites and inclinations in their souls which they dread to contemplate, and endeavour to conceal from themselves: these are rays of their original character breaking up through the forms and habits acquired amongst others. There are those, also, who experience impatient longings for perfection, who question daily their compliance with the maxims of the world, and are never

satisfied with the fashionable standard of virtue. These are they whom Cæsar denominated "men of impracticable consciences;" persons who seldom make their fortunes, who are not *sought after* in society, but who really love the simplicity of nature. The existence of such men is no chimera, and can upon very philosophical grounds be accounted for. Imagination is the great efficient cause.

But people of this cast are rarely the persons to understand the characters of others. They wear a severe, observing look, which discloses the drift of their meditations. Now, whoever would study the characters of those with whom he lives or converses, must keep up the appearance of a kind of recklessness and frivolity, for the mind closes itself up like the hedge-hog, at the least sensible touch of observation, and will not be afterwards drawn out. Men have been known in the middle of a discovery of their character, to be stopped short by a look, which brought them to themselves, and traced before them in an instant the danger of their position and the methods of escape. A keen observer, indeed, may always adjust the temperature of his discourse by the faces of his auditors, which are saddened or brightened, like the face of the sea in April, as more or less of the sunshine of rhetoric breaks forth upon them.

Men who are placed in conspicuous situations are supposed to be well known, because any one may soon learn the general opinion concerning them; which is thought to be an exact picture of their characters. But very few, even of such men, are ever known to the world. Still less are those understood whose birth and manners throw a rough covering over their souls, which, like the cases of the Grecian Hermæ, that were rude and shapeless without, but contained within the statues of the gods themselves, conceal the beauty of their intellect. There is nothing, in truth, that bespeaks so much sagacity, as to be able to detect genius in the obscurity of small beginnings, while the intellectual dawn is struggling, as it were, through the clouds, and revealing, by almost imperceptible rays, the brightness that is approaching. It is nevertheless very politic to mark the first signs of power in intellect, as well as in other forms; for genius, like beauty, treasures up the remembrance of insult and neglect,

*Manet alta mente repostum,*

and very often has much better means of revenge. It is a fine court-maxim, that, even in disgrace, those who are in the high-road to power ought to be respected; for, as a great author observes, many that are despised are destined by Providence to arrive at eminence and fortune; and

then, confusion to those who have treated them contemptuously! What renders it difficult for ordinary minds to discover a great man before he has, like a tree, put forth his blossoms, is the manner, various and dissimilar, in which such persons evolve their powers. For as in nature the finest days are sometimes in the morning overclouded and dark, so the development of genius follows no rule, but is hastened or retarded by position and circumstance. But to a keen eye there always appear, even in the first obscurity of extraordinary men, certain internal commotions and throes, denoting some *magna vis animi* at work within. These should rouse inquiry in the minds of whoever they may concern; for besides the reputation for wisdom and foresight which a person acquires by announcing the future appearance of any thing extraordinary, there is to be taken into the account the gratitude of genius, warm and lasting, in proportion to the excellence of the principle.

Many persons overlook a great character, because they observe it slow to come into the field of contention; but they should reflect, that he who has few wares in his shop can easily dispose them for sale, while the merchant who has numerous stores requires time and labour to prepare himself for business. There is, as Lord Bacon

observes, a *longanimity*, as well as a *magnanimity*, which demands scope and compass to evolve itself. There is a connexion and continuity in its energies which link it to a distant conclusion; but

Jam tum tenditque, foveatque.

Flowers and fruits, nature produces abundantly and rapidly upon her bosom, but she ripens gold and diamonds, and all her most durable gifts, in her obscurest womb. The maturing of men's minds bears a strong analogy to these different processes: the light and trifling are generated readily in the lap of fortune; but no one knows of the existence of the powerful and solid intellect till it comes out fully armed, like Minerva from the head of Jupiter.

The generality, however, are no gainers by this proceeding; for knowledge of character, as has been said before, is the grand *moyen de parvenir*, the mighty engine by which fortune lifts men up to the high places of this world. Some acquire it by experience, and, acting upon it, rise frequently to eminence without reflecting profoundly on the causes of their elevation. But the causes are really obvious: they are nothing but suppleness and the art of pleasing. And because this art has not even yet been very accurately described, we shall explain what is here meant by the *art of pleasing*. From original conformation, or from

accident, every man has in his mind an aptitude to receive delight from certain trains of ideas rather than from others; whoever is intimately acquainted with any one will quickly discover these trains, and, if he think it worth his while, will make himself beloved, by artfully managing to connect himself with their appearance. By pursuing this course for any length of time, his presence will become associated in the mind of the other with the most agreeable ideas, and serve, in some sort, as a mirror to reflect back upon his fancy its most delightful images. Through the same kind of policy, light and amusing writers preserve their ground with the public: they know that mankind are more solicitous for pleasure than for knowledge; that a delightful sensation will at any time outweigh a sublime idea; and that to describe what every body feels is flattering every body, by appearing to give to his transient delights a permanence and stability which he had not looked for. Men perpetually individualize, if that will express our meaning, the universal feelings of our nature; they think those things peculiar to themselves which are common to the species; and a writer that describes with tolerable accuracy his own sensations, pleasurable or painful, will describe those of the whole race, and appear to have looked into every body's bosom.

Upon how many authors has love bestowed immortality! And yet what discovery has ever been made,—what new idea added to our old notions of love? The writers in question first felt, and then reflected upon their feelings; the circumstances attending them were fresh upon the memory; the subsiding passion, in its departure, had deposited a voluptuous sediment upon all the faculties, and while this was fermenting, the mind gave vent to its rich terrestrial ideas, with all the bloom of love diffused over them. As the passion and its reminiscences are common, true descriptions of them find an easy way to the heart, which, once interested, bids defiance to criticism. The end of our being is happiness, and these works producing pleasure, its strongest ingredient, are thought to promote very sensibly the main design, and, it must be owned, not without some show of reason. But to return to the art of reaching fortune by pleasing an individual: there are no undertakings, the performance of which does not include at least as much labour as pleasure. Of these, great men, or rather, men of fortune and power, desire to have as much of the credit, and as little of the difficulty, as possible; in all such enterprises the *protégé* will consent, with an eye to futurity, to let *his* portion be made up of the greater number of unpleasant, and of the



smaller number of agreeable sensations; in other words, he will do a great deal for very little reward. Here, then, he suffers the great man's pains by proxy, and in so doing, enables himself by habit to suffer more, while his patron grows enervate, and consequently more in need of him every day. By degrees the protégé feels his own weight, and begins to presume upon his usefulness; and the patron, on the other hand, knowing very well that he stands in need of his co-operation, becomes inclined to part with a larger portion of the instruments of pleasure in order to preserve the remainder, now depending, in a great measure, upon his underling. It is in this way that fortune is acquired by the knowledge of character.

But, undoubtedly, there is a more dignified way of arriving at worldly greatness by the application of this knowledge. Whoever takes a long survey of his course of life, will immediately perceive, that towards whatever aim he directs his footsteps, his path is not through absolute solitude: moving in his way, there will be many rivals, many enemies, many inert hinderances, few co-operators, and of these he cannot misunderstand one without danger. Even his knowledge is a weapon that will stand him in no stead if it be not closely hidden; the reputation of it would

carry such a terror into men's minds, that they would never associate with him; for who could bear to be the companion of him, who

————— almost like the Gods,

Could even his thoughts unveil in their dumb cradles?

But, well dissembled and sharpened by experience, the knowledge of character is a sure help to success; and is the more honestly and cheerfully used, as no man is hurt by it, each being managed according to his nature, and only made to promote, blindly and without detriment to himself, the deeper designs of another. The *vis inertiae* of human nature, which we denominate indolence, is a thing upon which all calculate in making an estimate of their associates; but it requires a nice discernment to perceive from what quarter precisely we are to expect co-operation, and from what resistance.

In order to present a kind of frame to experience upon which it may spread out the various textures of humanity occurring in its way, philosophy has divided men into classes,—into the magnanimous, the poor-spirited, the phlegmatic, the irascible, the proud, the meek, &c.; but since it must always depend upon the observer to refer individuals to their class, the whole utility of this division consists in the accurate enumeration of the signs of the classes. For what will it avail

one to know, that a proud man will be an ill co-operator in certain designs, unless it be also known how, by his carriage, looks, or comportment, to discriminate between a proud man and a vain? Besides, large divisions include so many differences, that they are of small practical utility, being little more than the alphabet of human nature, which a man must combine many times before he can express his reasonings. Humanity is a common *substratum*, out of which individuals are formed with infinitely various qualities. It is disputed whether difference of character arises from the original mould, or from education: but character appears, in some degree at least, to be transmissible from father to son, and to continue, with slight modifications, to the extinction of a family. If this be proved, it will follow, that education is not so all-powerful as many pretend, but that, in certain tribes of men, there is a kind of *virus* which runs through the blood, and gives a secret tinge to the fountains of thought and action in the depths of the soul. Aristotle tells a story illustrative of hereditary irascibility, which is well worth transcribing: "Transports of anger . . . . seem to be congenial to some races of men; as in the family of him who apologized for beating his father, by saying, '*He* beat my grandfather, and my grandfather, the father before him; and

this little boy,' pointing to his son, 'will beat me when he is able: the fault runs in our blood!' " \* He elsewhere observes, that men of energetic characters, as Alcibiades, and Dionysius the elder, failing to transmit their intellectual qualities to their offspring, have progenerated a race leaning strongly towards madness. The animal part of the character, the passions, the affections, the desires, were transmitted in all their force, without that strong reason which, in their great ancestors, had regulated and controlled them.

But, to say no more on this point, which would demand a separate essay, and to recur again to the methods of discovering the character, whatever it be, for it is not yet decided what constitutes character in men. It appears, however, to be the result, or balance, more or less perfect, of the intellect, passions, and affections, by which an individual is impelled to perform actions common to all the species, in a way peculiar to himself. It is observed by philosophers, that the agitation of the passions operates imperceptibly on the muscles of the countenance, giving them abruptness and prominence in proportion to the violence of the inward struggles. Our contemporaries have mentioned Lord Byron as an example, who, they say, had those rough eleva-

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\* Ethics, book vii. Gillies' translation.

tions of muscle which indicate excessive passion. We can say nothing to this; we only know that our own experience does not corroborate the opinion. We have known many men whose passions were fierce, changeful, abrupt, and of continual recurrence, who had yet smooth even countenances, indicative of ease and tranquillity. Their eye, it is true, was dark, piercing, uneasy, and had an inscrutable glitter; but their characters could never have been inferred from thence. We likewise remember to have known a lady, of a mild placid countenance, full of looks of benevolence and urbanity, with eyes slow, humid, and modest, carriage and mien tranquil and dignified; yet that woman was a serpent, a Messalina. As it appears, however, that every passion has a corresponding sign in the visage, it has, by physiognomists been inferred that the face is a sure index to the mind. But, allowing that the existence of certain passions is indicated by the expression of the countenance, it will not follow that any clue is thereby afforded to discover whether those passions habitually subside in gratification, or are subdued by intellect; and in this consists the fallacy of physiognomy. But it is very questionable that the muscles of the countenance correspond exactly to the inward temperament; though we by no means think that the *expression* of a

man's visage is to be overlooked. For although it cannot by the countenance be known correctly how the mind it covers has been actuated for a long backward tract of time, which yet must be known if we would judge of *character* by physiognomy, we may almost infallibly discover the *present disposition* by it. And to this politicians confine the utility of reading the countenance. For when Atticus advised Cicero to keep strict watch over his face, in his first interview with Cæsar after the civil wars, he could not mean that he might thereby conceal his *character* from Cæsar, who knew well enough what that was; but he meant, that by such precaution he might conceal from the tyrant his actual hatred and disgust for his person. Yet for the character and secret nature of a man, *fronti nulla fides*.

Some men's minds resemble a mirror, and reflect back exactly the character of him with whom they converse. Such persons, therefore, are not to be studied when their mental face is towards you, properly disposed to give you back your own image. They must be observed by a side view, when their mind's surface is receiving the impression of other objects; as also at the moment these are withdrawn, when, like the pupil of the eye, on the removal of intense light or darkness, they gradually dilate or contract to

their natural size. An effort of magnanimity exhausts a weak mind, but strengthens one naturally strong. The former, like waves raised by a tempest, rapidly sinks to its original level; the latter, like a mountain lifted higher by an earthquake, preserves its new position.

It does not seem necessary, in order to know mankind, that a man should be much in the throng. He may sit quietly on the shore of human society, and observe the rise, fall, and current of the tide, much better than those who are tossed about upon its billows, and obliged to use all their efforts to keep themselves from sinking. But this is what men of business can seldom comprehend. They think, because they have been conversant with affairs in detail, and have come in contact with a great number of men, that therefore the characters and principles of their associates at least must be known to them. But this is seldom the case. Dissimulation and hypocrisy are a cloud, which, like that of *Æneas*, screens the man who walks under it from all common observation; and people never spread this cloud so diligently over their characters, as when they have to do with persons like themselves. Besides, in general, men of the world have no time to reason on the *data* afforded by their experience, which supplies but badly the



want of principles. For this reason, such persons never properly conceive extraordinary characters; because, as these occur to them but seldom in their course of life, their experience only enables them to perceive a difference, without determining exactly whether for the worse or for the better. They take a man's character up where it comes in their way, and judge of it superciliously in its present position, never troubling themselves with calculating its previous race, the obstacles it has surmounted, the difficulties it has subdued, the temptations it has resisted.

How then shall we know mankind, if we can trust neither their words, their looks, nor their deeds?—By their passions and affections. These are the keys of the soul. There is exaggeration, but there is no dissimulation in passion: it bares the bosom of the closest; it sports with policy; it laughs even intellect, for a time, to scorn. But its undivided reign in a great character is short; mind retreats but for a moment, and returning, curbs, calms, subdues it at length. To know a man thoroughly we should be able to watch him in these conflicts, in which the workings of the soul are unveiled; whence we might in time be able to predicate, *à priori*, what he would do, and what he would be, in any given situation of life.

It is delightful, even in contemplation and

anticipation, to be able to lift the veil from the souls of men; to be the "animarum spectator" of our species. For if we meet but too frequently with a ludicrous or dark prospect, there are occasions in which we find men much better than we expected. We have always thought, therefore, that such writers as Rochefoucault are the satirists, not the painters, of human nature. He in particular believed that all men move on the same dead level as they generally do in a court, and was deceived by the sameness of his experience. To know the characters of men, we must go to the study of them without an hypothesis, see them singly, and reserve it to the last to erect a theory from the result of our observations. This kind of knowledge always accompanies extraordinary abilities: the reader will recollect the Athenian Timon's judgment of Alcibiades; Sylla's opinion of Cæsar, and Cæsar's own decision respecting Anthony, Brutus and Cassius. Tiberius was a keen judge of men; and, in our own days, Napoleon knew perfectly well how to read the heart.



**DANGER**  
**OF**  
**DIFFERING FROM THE MODE.**



### CHAP. III.

#### DANGER OF DIFFERING FROM THE MODE.

THERE has in every age been a kind of tacit general consent between the ideas of all civilized nations that have flourished together. Slight shades of difference there always must be, but the main body of notions prevailing at any particular period, are cognate, and of similar complexion. And it is this general resemblance, a kind of family-likeness, between the ideas of contemporaries, which we denominate *the spirit of the age*, and every thing which is considerably different is regarded as affectation of singularity.

It has never, as far as we know, been decided exactly what degree of conformity to public opinions and manners a man's duty demands of him; or whether it be actually in his competence to submit to the spirit of the times. But however this may be, singularity, whether affected or not, is nearly always sure to prejudice an

individual in the opinion of the world; the singular man being shunned as carefully, almost, as the bad man, with whom he is often confounded. People do not understand him. He is not one of themselves. The question is, does the world, in thus setting its face against an individual, act conformably to justice? If it does, all singular men, all authors of sects; all, in short, who disturb prevailing notions, or set established customs at defiance, are bad citizens.

The claims made upon the conformity of each individual by the generality, are very extensive. There is scarcely an office or an act of life, however retired or unimportant, for which fashion has not prescribed the mode. In an enlarged sense, all mankind perform the great functions of their being simultaneously, as an army goes through its evolutions. Day calls them from slumber, and night again oppresses them with oblivion, almost altogether. They eat, dress, sleep, dream at nearly the same season of the day and night, as if they had entered into a contract to suffer, and to forget their miseries in company.

From this circumstance, a consequence of their nature, men learn to look in every predicament for conformity to the mode; and, when they find it not, or find it in a degree insufficient and inconsiderable, to feel irritation, anger, repug-



nance, or even antipathy and hatred. 'Tis no matter whether the hated singularity appear in great things or in small, for in either case it is understood equally to indicate a contempt for grey-headed reverend custom. If in great things, it is inferred that the delinquent must nourish his opinions with viperous designs against society, and have cast them in some forbidden infernal mould, hidden and unknown to honest well-meaning people. If in small, the world is provoked to find itself so little respected as to be set at nought for mere trifles. And thus, no person can with impunity presume to differ from the generality.

We have proofs, indeed, before our eyes daily, in those striking manifestations of feeling which escape the multitude, of man's deep-rooted inherent antipathy to strangeness of every kind. A long beard; a garment of unusual make, or of unusual colour; a dwarfish or a gigantic stature; odd coloured eyes; extreme ugliness; excessive strength: all these call forth expressions of contempt or aversion. The reader who is familiar with London, must have observed a gentleman nearly eight feet high, walking about the streets in the dusk of the evening. As soon as his gigantic breast appears over the heads of the populace, every eye is turned up upon his countenance

moving almost in a line with the lamps, which throw a brighter light upon it than reaches the faces below. They who see him for the first time, are pictures of gaping wonder; and the innumerable crowds, the seas of people through which this second Polypheme wades, not breast-deep, utter a murmur of envious ridicule, as they make way for him, and appear glad to get rid of the monster. But why should a man be laughed at because his head is nearer the clouds than that of any other person among a million? Is it a crime to be tall? Are men all in their hearts like Herod, who cut off his son's head because it overtopped his own?

Be this as it may, the majority of mankind experience, in the presence of every unaccustomed object, an uneasy feeling, which affects them indescribably. A mysterious sentiment that there is something wrong flutters, as it were, about their hearts, and by degrees becomes painful. And this sentiment always recurring as often as the irksome object is in sight, the mere instinctive aversion to pain teaches them at length to shun the thing which they know by experience sure to cause it.

There are men whose presence is painful. Not that we know any ill of them, or expect positively to receive any injury at their hands. What creates

our dislike, and sometimes our apprehension of danger, is some peculiar bias of feature, or sinister expression, a kind of finger-post set up by nature at the doubtful cross-roads of human character. Every kind of singularity, therefore, in manners and appearances, has a tendency to disturb, more or less, the intercourse that should subsist between man and man, as it conveys an indication of contemptuous pride, or secret persuasion of superiority, offensive in all cases to our haughty self-love. Accordingly, all those who slide easily into the affections of men have a kind of natural dissimulation; a loose-jointed shifting countenance which adapts itself readily to the occasion; they become all things to all men; they lead their own passions about, muzzled like tame bears, to allure the passions of others. But this conduct does not necessarily imply moral turpitude; for John Hampden was remarkable for masking his own designs and opinions, that he might discover those of others; and Atticus valued himself on that urbanity and sweetness of disposition, which, with wonderful versatility, could accommodate itself in turns to the vanity of Cicero, the ambition of Cæsar, the truculent fierceness of Sylla, the peevish intolerable humour of Cæcilius, the coarseness of Antony, and the virtue and philosophic gravity of Brutus.

Many persons now living have all this Pomponian suavity of character, and put it out at similar interest.

As contemporaries seem designed to keep pace with each other in intellect, no less than in manners, every one who rushes on far beyond the ranks, or exhibits any very strong desire to do so, is naturally viewed from that moment with suspicion, at least, if not with envy and aversion. His constitutional vigour and alacrity receive the name of affectation, and instead of being considered a great man, he is sometimes regarded as a mountebank. This has happened in our own age. When Mr. Bentham published his *Defence of Usury*, almost fifty years ago, he was treated as a visionary, and his notions were despised. Time went on, and in the course of thirty or forty years some few came up with Mr. Bentham's position, and found it no longer so absurd as it had appeared through the mists of distance. Meanwhile, the philosopher was stretching away before them, inventing and discovering, and still appearing in his new positions as ludicrous as in the matter of usury. When they overtake him again, they may again find him rational; and, meantime, he can wait.

The dexterity with which men throw an air of ridicule over whatever is new or extraordinary has

been often remarked. It is the weapon of indolence. But nature originally bestowed it upon man to enable him to defend himself against the pretensions of quackery and useless innovation. He employs it, however, against all novelties, and against all opinions, new or old, not in present vogue. Indeed, opinion, like Janus, has two faces, one fascinating and beautiful, which it always turns towards its worshipper; the other withered, wrinkled, deformed, odious, which we never see till we have dismissed it, or refused to hold converse with it. The example of the early Christian writers, for the most part newly escaped from the errors of Paganism, illustrates this; for, no sooner had they shaken off their allegiance to Jupiter, than the golden domes of Olympus were transformed in their imagination into wizards' dens, even while their garments were yet perfumed by the incense of the Pagan altar. And recently, in France, we have seen a striking instance of the mutability of opinion. From time immemorial, the Catholic religion had prevailed there; antiquity had made it venerable; it spoke to the hearts and imaginations of the people from a thousand sacred altars, and was propped up by ceremonies and mysteries, and the law, and the early and almost ineradicable prejudices of the mind. The French people thought it a beautiful

faith. Anon, came the new light of modern philosophy. Persecution fanned it into a blaze, and as it increased, the fires of the altar waned, flickered, were extinguished, and lost in their own ashes. The French had now a beautiful philosophy, and Catholicism, viewed in its departing aspect, appeared a horrid and hateful monster. Times have again changed, and Catholicism, now amiable again, is taking peaceable possession of its ancient seats, and driving out its enemy by the most vigorous measures.\*

When public opinion is thus fluctuating, individuals have some difficulty in preserving themselves from the charge of singularity, to which all such persons are obnoxious as maintain in these sudden changes a sober and steady mind. There are, however, but very few in any country entertaining thoughts and opinions that ought really to be termed singular. For, although there be nothing too absurd for men to believe conjointly with others, they dread to embrace even truth itself, if they are to embrace it alone, in silence and solitude. Men have always thought and believed in masses, under the standard of intellectual despots, in the same manner as they fight in

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\* Since the above was written, Catholicism has been put upon a level with all other religions in France, which has now no established faith.

masses beneath the banners of political despots. Throughout the whole earth, you may observe opinions and ideas, like swarms of bees, clustering together upon particular spots, or as if, like certain trees and plants, they were indigenous to the soil. So that it is no less natural in a Hindoo to believe in Krishna and Brahma, than it is for him to abstain from beef and to feed on rice. We grant that among the idolaters of Hindostan and Tibet, individuals may sometimes be found who differ in many respects from the true orthodox believers. But were the creed of these heretics properly examined, it would be found to be nothing more than a remoter emanation from the national doctrine, refracted as it were from the peculiarities of some individual character. It is reserved for one man in many thousand years to plant a new root of opinion, created by his own solitary reflections. The lighter and more volatile spirits, for ever on the wing in search of novelty, are the first to receive the untried seeds, and to scatter them over the surface of society. In this process, the first converts are esteemed the most honourable by the rising sect, for all teachers value docility more than prudence and circumspection.

But in whatever way we turn, we meet with proofs that all men have naturally a distrust of



every thing which is singular and strange, even they who invent and propagate it. There would, indeed, be few founders of sects, and preachers of novel doctrines, if it were not that the human mind is always uneasy when it stands in any manner apart from the rest of the world. The solitude of opinion is not less insufferable than local solitude. We are aware that men colour, with the specious pretence of a love for truth, their inordinate zeal for the spread of their own opinions, and perhaps they are sometimes sincere; but, in general, men's eagerness to create imitators and make proselytes arises from the irksomeness of standing alone, or with few resembling them, and from the dread of that ridicule and antipathy which the world always casts on every departure from its received notions. Wise men once bowed down before Jupiter and Neptune, and felt no misgiving in their hearts while they worshipped, because millions bent the knee along with them. It would now be difficult, or, perhaps, impossible, to find a dozen persons in all Europe who could be persuaded to return to Paganism. Is it because every man in Europe is now wiser than Homer or Ulysses? We fear not. Millions of them believe that the Deity may be transmuted into a slice of bread, and, under that shape, eaten. They see no absurdity in this. None at all. But,

tell them that the God of the Pagans was omnipotent and wise, and neither slumbered nor slept, and add, that his name was Jupiter, or Zeus, or Mithra, or Osiris, and they will laugh at you. They know no such God, and will inform you that the *world* is now grown wiser than to worship *idols*. Is it? Are the Chinese, (themselves more numerous than all the Christians upon the earth,) the Hindoos, the Tartars, the Malays, the thousand tribes of Africa, the aboriginal Americans, the millions scattered over the Eastern Ocean, and even the Laplanders of Europe; are all these grown too wise to be every whit as idolatrous as the Greeks and Romans? No! but Jupiter has had his day, and Brahma and the Fetiches will have theirs.

Of all men living, your true proselyte-maker is the most disagreeable companion. Every thing you can say or do ministers occasion to his zeal. He reads "sermons in stones," and from all he sees draws matter for his converting vein. It is his hobby-horse. There is philanthropy, however, as well as greatness of mind, in conforming with prevailing customs and unconquerable prejudices, so long as they are indifferent as to vice or virtue. For all opposition ruffles the tranquillity of life; and love for our species should dispose us, unless when important truths and political rights

are concerned, to fall in with the customs and observances of our country, that we may give our neighbours the pleasure, however small, of our countenance and fellowship. Littleness of mind, and intemperate zeal, its usual concomitant, are incapable of this forbearance. They subsist upon strife and contention. A zealot, possessed by peculiar notions, whether good or bad, could no more contain his budget of singularities, than a thunder-cloud the lightning. He keeps his opinions in edge by wounding the feelings of his neighbour with them. He travels from occasion to occasion, like an Irish pedlar with his linen; calls at the door of every man's mind, vending here an ell, and there a piece, of his precious merchandise. He does not manufacture opinions for his own wear, but to sell. Like a gossiping woman, his mind is never so unhappy as when confined at home. The breath of his nostrils is argument; his delight, to see the harmless prejudices of his fellow-creatures impaled upon the points of his wit. He praises knowledge, and has respect for truth in his mouth, but all the while knows well, that ignorance is the only field in which he can hope to reap reputation. Restless sophists of this sort would rather find all mankind a blind herd, weary of their old conductors, but ready to follow in any direction the footsteps

of new ones, than see the scales fall from their eyes, leaving them in possession of a degree of light in which every man might see his own way.

The old proverb, "birds of a feather flock together," is a philosophical axiom. Men love every thing that is like themselves, and in general hate whatever is different. Among cannibals it must be a heinous sin against the mode, to abstain from dining off a man's leg or arm, and to prefer a slice of bread-fruit, or the chine of a wild boar. Anthropophagites hate singularity like other people.

But it is not until society has reached a certain point, that men affect to differ by some fantastical peculiarity from the rest of the world. While man continues in the condition of a savage, he has so many things to rouse and excite him, that he stands in no need of affectation. He struggles with the force of wild beasts by day, and at night is often kept awake by their howling and roaring round his hut. The wolf and the lion lie in his morning walk, the alligator lurks in his bathing-place, the eagle or the condor hovers over his cot, to pounce, as soon as he turns his back, upon his kid or his child. His passions never slumber. Terror and revenge roll over his mind by turns, as the war-whoop of his enemy

bursts upon his defenceless hiding-place, or as he himself dashes his tomahawk into the brains of his foe.

The highly civilized and polished man has for the most part to contend with no enemies but his own *ennui* and vacancy of thought. Art has made the world smooth and uniform for him ; and nature has so far lost her power over him that he almost forgets her existence. Art is every where, and does every thing. He sees her issue from his cities, and lead her highways and her canals over plain and mountain. The whole face of the country is hers. By degrees all his feelings grow to be artificial. The roughness and the energy of nature are lost ; and from a being almost wholly moulded of passion and power, he dwindles into a thing of fancies and conceits, trembles at phantoms and chimeras, is sad or mirthful according to the colour of his dreams, and learns, at length, to make his happiness depend entirely on that army of politicians, preachers, writers, actors, heretics, enthusiasts, &c., who undertake to cause a succession of ideas to pass through his imagination like landscapes through a camera lucida.

Then it is that, like the ancient king, he holds out the hope of extravagant rewards to the inventors of new pleasures, and that the mines of

imagination and the stores of nature are ransacked for excitement. In this state of things, and as a novel variety, affectation of singularity springs up. And sometimes it succeeds. But, being a commodity that must be used immediately, its manufacturers are ruined if they bring it not to market at the critical moment, for it will not keep.

By well-timing his extravagances, however, almost any person might acquire a certain sort of reputation. Eratostratus,

Th' aspiring youth that fired th' Ephesian dome !

immortalized his name by tossing a lighted torch into the combustible part of a temple. Elwes will long be remembered by mankind, because he had a very close pocket, and dined on a bit of dry bread or a boiled egg, while he might have sat down to the costliest dainties. And, then, think of Ravaillac and Damien:—assassins ! but nevertheless chronicled by fame.

Cleopatra, and Ninon, and Diana of Poitiers, with hundreds of their like, have fastened their names on the page of history, because they understood the theory of lust and voluptuousness more perfectly than other courtezans. Why are Phryne, and Lais, and Lamia, and Flora, remembered ? Why are their names more familiar to

men's tongues than those of Bacon and Newton? Is it because one of them endeared herself to Demetrius Poliorcetes, and another to Pompey, by her amorous bites? And because the others did things equally worthy of fame? Barely to be known to posterity, no matter for what, is a poor ambition. Swedenborg, Jacob Bøehmen, and Johanna Southcote, are as sure to be in some degree known to posterity, as St. Pachomius and St. Anthony, personages no less fanatical and silly, are known to this age. So will Madame Krudener and the Abbé de la Mennais. In reality, nature appears to produce such persons, as she produces dwarfs and wittols, merely to diversify life, and to add to the catalogue of human amusements; and the public use them, perhaps unwittingly, as the Romans did their gladiators, encouraging them by looking on, to pierce each other by railing and invective, and to wield in turn the sophist's net, to entangle the weapons of their assailants.

But, although singularity, as well as the affectation of it, is in general disagreeable to mankind, they have always shown a disposition to admire it, under the name of originality, in the character and productions of the mind. When nature imprints any peculiar features on the intellect of an individual, she always takes care so to harmonize



them with each other, that they appear rather the marks of a new species than of a monstrous singularity. And, therefore, real originality is pleasing, as the common experience of life sufficiently proves. We all occasionally make new acquaintances, and if we observe the conduct of our minds at such seasons, we shall discover curiosity, restless, anxious, busy to find some opening into the character, like a nesting-swallow fluttering about the eaves of a barn. But in most cases, no sooner has it scaled the outworks, and had time to look about it, than it turns back discouraged at the dreary appearance of the interior, which is the cause of so many short-lived friendships, as we see die before us daily. Not so when there is originality. Then we love the prospect which opens upon us, and are never tired with expatiating among its beauties. Indeed most men are sensible to the delight of pitching upon a man who really has a distinct character of his own; who nurses and prunes his ideas after his own fashion, as if he had received a patent from nature to preserve his method and management to himself.

Original ideas are in fact the proper dress of the aristocracy of intellect, which distinguishes them from the vulgar, as the rich brocade, and cloth of gold, and embroidered vests of our an-

cestors marked gentility of blood. But even this dress may be imitated. For as cunning very often contrives to carry the appearance of wisdom, so servility at times succeeds, by cautious thieving, in decking itself with the badges of genius. And of all the distinctive marks of mental power, singularity of manner is the most easily put on. But this distinction is quickly lost by diffusion; the secret soon transpires that it is an imitable quality; shoals of imitators arise, and the natural, or at least peculiar, manner of one great man serves to disguise the barren mediocrity of a thousand. This has been illustrated in our times by Lord Byron and his innumerable mimics. His Lordship possessed undoubted genius of a very high order; but his manner of displaying it was not quite free from affectation and quackery. Every man, therefore, ambitious of resembling this new Hercules, assumed his club and lion's skin, and hoped to be mistaken, if not for the hero himself, at least for his equal.

All originality of mind, as we have said before, is singularity; but while it keeps within the circle that bounds the ideas of the age, though beating constantly about the extreme circumference, it is relished and admired. It is only when it flies beyond the central attraction of fashion, and revolves in another orbit, that it becomes an object

of distrust and fear, or at least of neglect, to the rest of mankind. But even should a man be carried, by the force or natural tendency of his mind, to this remoteness from popular ideas, he might still, perhaps, by caution and art, preserve a resemblance to them in his productions, as the furthest visible star is clothed with the same kind of brightness as encloses the head of Sirius or Orion.



## EDUCATION OF GREAT MEN.



## CHAP. IV.

### EDUCATION OF GREAT MEN.

IT is a principle in human nature to be pleased with the beginnings of things. We delight to approach the fount of causation, to see the first bud of mighty designs bursting into being. Directed by this leaning of the mind, the philosophers of antiquity pondered on the birth of the universe, constructed systems, and bowed down their spirits before them. From the same cause we seek the origin of fashions, of customs, of religions, of the founders of empires, builders of castles, inventors of arts and sciences ; delighting to look for ourselves into the early lives of men of genius and renown. We hope by these means to discover the disposing causes of their superiority, and, generally, to step into that sunshine which forwarded and ripened their minds. Besides, there is in such persons a rich vein of enthusiasm which flourishes most in youth, before

the world has driven back the sap of life to stagnate round the heart. It is true, indeed, that they never cool and harden into rigidity like other people ; but in early life their imaginations are in perfect fusion, floating hither and thither, like the sea, and ready to run into any matrix which may be placed by chance before the violence of their current. From some imperfect and vague notices of this peculiarity, it happens that common individuals attribute an extreme waywardness to men of genius, especially during youth, and consider them as meteoric fires which are driven by some uncertain force through eccentric and unknown paths. Upon this principle, too, their weaknesses are sometimes excused ; as if their superiority in the higher provinces of mind, necessarily inferred a frail and indeterminate purpose in the meaner affairs of life. But this reasoning is no less silly than it is false. It is, in fact, the malicious labour of mediocrity, seeking by every means to bring down every thing to its own level. The real man of genius has but one purpose in life ; and that is, to push his mind to the utmost verge of its capability. For this he is not to neglect the charities, the affections, or the duties of life ; he is not, and cannot be, cut off from the necessities of his species : but he knows better than any man what



things are truly estimable, what not, and values them accordingly. Upon his affections he builds his knowledge of affection; upon his wants, his pity and compassion; upon the discharge of his own duties, the exact estimate of what is to be required at the hands of humanity. Thus the unity of his purpose comprehends whatever excellences nature has placed within our reach; and by how many of these he fails to attain, by so many is his scheme short of perfection.

At its first setting forth, genius sometimes lies undistinguished among the crowd; for it is too commonly the lot of men of few worldly pretensions. This, however, is not the worst thing that could happen to it; for, while thus unnoticed, it forms its strange habits with impunity. It steps on cautiously and at leisure over the field of knowledge; it pauses when, and where, and how it pleases. It has no vulgar appetite for starting up among its fellows as a prodigy, or for drawing upon its movements the intemperate gaze of superior learning. Such hot-house fires as give premature ripeness to the mind, it shuns and abominates, endeavouring only to keep pace with nature and her seasons. The mere mob are better companions for a youth of this stamp than your half-literary people. Less conceited and

more natural in their follies, the former completely overlook him. He is a star entirely out of their sphere. But the latter, without being better able to judge of the force of his mind, and with less disposition to tolerate the effervescence of his unruly passions, throw themselves around him, as country-folks crowd about a mountebank, and make to themselves an enigma of him. This proceeding renders him either vain or shy. He *shows off*, as it is called, or shrinks from them; and in either case he is a loser.

For this reason it is that that deep enthusiasm, which shakes the fancy and imagination like a perpetual earthquake, is pleased with the solitude of woods and ruins, the dim silence of night, the roaring and tossing of the sea; and when it has had its fill of these, or is driven by necessity to quit them, it naturally goes among the most unrestrained company, where the song and the laugh are frequent. The hollow civilities of fashionable society have but few charms for such as see through them completely; and men of genius have sharp eyes in such matters. Besides, among the vulgar they are not expected to contract unequal friendships; they are permitted to come and go without exciting wonder or inquiry; they are never nailed down by politeness to listen to ignorant and insipid criticisms upon

the hallowed productions of the muse, or to hear some upstart's pretensions preferred before the claims of lasting merit.

The sort of conversation which obtained in ancient society, especially when youth was present, seems to have been peculiarly adapted for the nourishment of genius. The achievements of their heroes, the systems of their philosophers, the wonders and peculiarities of foreign lands; such were the subjects which amused the leisure hours of Euripides and Plato. Their education was longer than ours, though completed in fewer years. But every moment was employed. A visit to a friend, a jaunt into the country, a day at the theatre, were so many lessons of taste or of wisdom. Plato's Dialogues were composed from the actual conversations of his master, though it has been said he added many things. The famous work on the Republic, then, originated in a walk to the Piræus. What a luxury did the Greeks make of friendship and thought! But by their method nothing was hastened before its time. A high and inspired mind is seldom rapidly matured; it follows the process by which the most valuable productions of nature are formed; it grows insensibly. Necessity has sometimes, it is true, reversed this proceeding, and crowded and hastened its efforts, till an un-

timely ripeness has been produced, which has caused the death of the plant: but there have been few Chattertons and Kirke Whites. Nor is it desirable that there should be many: nurtured upon nature's moderate regimen, those youths (the former at least) might have lived long, and given birth to works of very high character. The true secret of their precocity was their applying that time to meditation, which should have been employed in storing the mind with more knowledge. The richness of Chatterton's fancy was expended on a very narrow range; it was undividedly directed one way. His metaphors and allusions are beautiful; but they do not indicate extensive so much as intense thought. What he wished to know he studied with irrepressible ardour; but he restrained his warmth with a severe economy: he perceived it was not for him to know too many things. The same courage, united to the same degree of industry and enthusiasm, would at any time produce the same results: their union, in fact, is genius. Kirke White had a much weaker, and, to speak the truth, a far inferior mind; his poetry has not the high and impassioned tone which distinguishes that of the other: it is lengthy, diffuse, and feeble, though occasionally very sweet and pleasing.

But in all instances the early life of genius is a life of labour and intellectual privation ; for, however extensive its powers, the mind, sooner or later, discovers that it cannot taste of every kind of knowledge, and leave itself time for meditation ; and the earlier it makes this discovery, with the more vigour does it draw together its forces, and press forward in its chosen track. Men of common intellect suffer a change from the inroad of foreign notions ; acquired ideas expand over their minds like water over a flat surface, leaving none of those bold prominences, thrusting their heads above the waves, which display the inward habits of the soul. From a conviction of this kind, persons of strong minds, nay, perhaps, of genius, have gradually weaned themselves from books, and taken entirely to thinking. But reading, like a skilful gardener, turns up the soil of the mind, and deposits the seeds of thought, leaving to reflection and study, as to the airs and dews of heaven, the office of fructifying and maturing the future plants.

To despise learning is often the portion of wrong-headed genius ; but learning is, in respect to thought, what a large estate or capital is to industry. The man of five acres will never be able to cope with him, who, possessing equal industry, has a hundred. Those only are con-

temptible who attach importance to the *possession* and not to the *use*, of learning. It is, however, a mistake to think that acquirements trench upon originality; for as the *material* of every thing we possess is acquired from sources external to ourselves, it is but little matter whether we draw from nature or from books, which are pictures of nature; for genius, like a politic general, will take care not to trust the event of the battle to mercenaries or allies. They may assist in making its phalanxes square and of complete aspect, but are lost in the number of native troops, and sway not the fortune of the field. But in this, as in all things, genius is at variance with common conclusions; and the reason why great men differ thus from ordinary persons, is, that their loftiness giving the effect of nearness, causes them to see more of objects than the curvity of the common ground he stands on permits to the eye of the low spectator; as men upon a mountain perceive a ship at sea long before it becomes visible to those on the level shore. It may not be prudent, therefore, for a man of great conceptions always to give the whole scope of his ideas, because persons of ordinary capacities will be apt to lose all perception of their proportions; in like manner as it is thought a fly is incapable of taking in the whole of any large object at once, believing itself while

perched on the back of an ox to be upon a large plain. We have seen people puzzled by a great idea in this manner; for them it had neither head nor tail.

It is accordingly observable, that great authors plunge not at once into the depths of speculation, but, taking their readers by the hand, lead them out gradually over a shelving bottom, feeling their way as they go. We may be said to follow this method when we take a great man from the cradle, and pursue with attention the course and unfolding of his mind. We go on like an Abyssinian watching the wanderings of the Nile, from his humble and hidden source, until he mixes his broad waters with the ocean. And it is no less delightful than instructive thus to linger round the sources and outsetting of genius; thus to mark the accession of tributary streams, which widen and deepen the intellectual current; thus to pursue the triumphant disemboguing of its treasures: it is the best part of mental geography.

It is certain that the whole current of after-life frequently takes its rise from some trivial cause. Some simple book or chance-thought gives it its direction; and the knowledge of that book or idea might afford us one means of judging how greatness is attained. No man is great without being conscious of his greatness, without knowing

of what importance a knowledge of the march and conformation of his mind might be to his fellow-creatures. It may, therefore, seem almost unaccountable why men of genius have been averse to laying themselves open to the world. In their greatest familiarity there is a reserve. Like skilful anglers, they proportion the length of their line to the depth of the stream in which they may be fishing, and never totally unwind the clue. In youth they act thus from a modest policy, to disarm envy, and preserve their minds fresh and free from the taint of vulgarity. In manhood they are too deeply involved in the disposing, ripening, and perfecting of their schemes, to turn aside for the purpose of gathering up the shreds of memory relating to their opening prospects. Their youth is one strongly connected and uninterrupted dream; their manhood the counterpart, or realization of that dream in actual performance. We prefer looking, perhaps, upon the former part, when the mind, creating and drawing together its forces, seems to be invigorated with supernatural energy, and capable of things which are shorn and curtailed, in the performance, of half their magnitude. But for this very reason genius may shun reflections upon its early days, when its grand purposes were sketched out in bold and shadowy outline; when its wealth



seemed inexhaustible, no account being made of the tare and tret, and custom-house dues, and fees, and accidental losses, which were to reduce its proud riches to poor and insignificant measure. It is seldom that truly great minds are the favourites of fortune; her frowns often keep their projects freezing in embryo until the time for action is over; or else she comes with her minions when the golden harvest is almost ready for the sickle, and tramples it to the dust. After this, who can expect the owner to speak of sowing-time with pleasure! Regret imposes silence on his tongue.

Persons, however, who give early indications of great intellect, and afterwards produce nothing, are not always to be reckoned amongst those whose plans have been dissipated by fortune. They may have been equal to the rapid acquisition of common endowments, but incapable of reaching at any time those heights of knowledge or fancy, on which the mind matures its superiority. For those who attain the first resting-places of Parnassus, and halt there to be seen of those below, lose by degrees that warm impulse which might have carried them higher; but they must have been, from the first, too weak even to think of the summit.

The greater part of the early habits and deter-

minations of genius are formed from choice. No man can have intellectual greatness "thrust upon him." He sees the goal, and knowing that the interspace must be passed, betakes himself to labour, to the removal of obstacles, to the opening himself a way. He makes his own compass, and steers his own course. The love of solitude, which men of genius profess, is often thought by the world to be no better than affectation; but whoever would do any thing great must be much alone: his enthusiasm is cooled in crowds. He learns to attach less importance to his views: at least he does not think them the only things on earth worthy of consideration. But in solitude every thing seems passive to his mind, nature herself appears to crouch at his feet, his power increases with his consciousness of possessing it, and he forms vast designs through the hope of fulfilling them.

Nevertheless, those whose only aim is transient popularity, have nothing to do with solitude. Their province is to watch the shifting gale which governs the tide of fashion, that they may launch their bark at the most favourable moment: if they lose that, they are undone. But what is the present temper of the winds to him who calculates on the chances of eternity? He puts to sea on the elements in a bark as everlasting as them-

selves, and caring not for the weather, can afford to wait a tide or two. "I must confess," said Lord Bacon, "my desire to be, that my writings should not court the present time, or some few places, in such sort as might make them either less general to persons, or less permanent to future ages." And, in spite of his great employments, he loved solitude. "*Magis videor cum antiquis versari quàm cum his quibuscum vivo.*" This is ever the confession of deep and lasting minds: such are their society, and such their wishes! When Sophocles lay all night among the reeds of the Ilissus, listening to the nightingale, it was not merely that he might feast upon the melody of that bird's notes, but that then his mind was lulled to the deepest contemplation. In such a situation no thought, unworthy of the united majesty of genius and nature, could spring up in the mind: the soul was purified, and the imagination raised. The whole was a conception purely Grecian.

From their retired habits, and sparing respect for common institutions, great men are sometimes accused of misanthropy. With some restriction the accusation may be just. Genius is but too frequently trampled upon in its commencement by presumption and ignorance; and the very act of curbing its impatience is produced by looking forward to a day of retribution, when

it shall be able to give vent to its inward hatred of littleness, and repay scorn with scorn. But this feeling, in truly great minds, wears away as they ascend in dignity. They no longer view the inflictors of petty vexations as worthy of their hatred, and their affection for their species gains ground in proportion as they are raised above its failings; as we hallow even unpleasant places in our memories, when absence has winnowed away their imperfections. But it is not so with institutions; these are but too often as dead walls, which prevent the clear prospect of man's nature, and must be thrown down, or pierced by convenient openings, before it can be seen how far he may be led on in the road of improvement. These dead walls, man builds up between himself and his fears, for he is always afraid of futurity, and the changes it may bring along with it; but he shuts up his real enemies in the same enclosure with himself, and this he finds to his cost, when he has obstructed his own progression. Nature does not contain a more miserable thing than a nation which has closed up every avenue to its own improvement. It is like those Africans, who, as Mungo Park tells us, let down a great crate, or wicker trap, upon themselves and the lions they were attempting to ensnare, when every soul was sooner or later devoured by his own folly.

Discovering this at a very early age, minds of great powers exert themselves to break through such institutions as are opposed to the free development of the human faculties, and which have no other tendency than to maintain their own duration at the expense of the people's understanding. Where men are free, the laws co-operate with individuals in carrying their genius to as much perfection as its nature will bear; and this cannot be done where, by the laws, many subjects of thought are interdicted, and where great talents are not the only means of arriving at the dignities of the state. Whatever may be said, Athens was the country for men of genius: what means and excitements to study did she not possess! Her very mechanics were superior in taste and judgment to kings; and it is questionable, whether the Roman senate, with all its pride, could see through the intricacies of a debate with as much clearness and tact as the people of Athens. Cicero only flattered or laughed at his countrymen when he pretended to prefer them to the Greeks; they were inferior as individuals, and as a nation. For a people is neither to be estimated by its conquests nor by the duration of its institutions: the Tartars subdued more countries in one age, than the Romans during the whole existence of their state; and the little republic of San Marino

was of no longer duration: but neither of these can by any means be compared with the Roman commonwealth.

Within themselves, however, men of genius attach more importance to thinking than to acting; because they perform the former by themselves, and therefore more independently. In action, on the contrary, there is always the alloy of foreign interference—other men are concerned either as actors or sufferers—and they feel the irksomeness of awaiting an uncertain issue. For this reason, minds of the first order sometimes retard the progress of business; they refine too much for the rough frame of things, and are especially guilty of this in youth, before they have discovered that they are not as other men, who are content with as much of facts as comes before them, seeking little into remote consequences.

It is certain, also, that sensibility is a considerable ingredient of genius. By nature its sympathies are more extensive and intense than those which are given to ordinary mortals. But men, undertaking to criticise the ancient master-pieces of poetical art, without the requisite insight into human nature, and relying upon the sole knowledge of the structure of language, have condemned Homer and Virgil for the facility with which their heroes shed tears. It is a pity that

persons like these should ever venture on poetical criticism. Heroism, when it is genuine, is as much built upon physical sensibility as any other species of greatness; as it arises from a due mingling of all the great passions, among which pity and affection claim to be numbered. Ulysses weeping at the recital of his sufferings by Demodocus, and Eneas uttering lamentations in the storm, were moved by the same passions differently actuated. The former, being still far from his country, and in great uncertainty as to his ever being permitted to revisit it, is melted at the remembrance of what deeds of valour, and wisdom, and stratagem, (tinged probably by conscience with some degree of guilt,) he had achieved and undergone in vain. The latter, anticipating and fearing, not so much his own death, and the death of his only child, as the consequent extinction of all his vast hopes of empire in Italy, of the renewal of the Trojan name, of the establishment and perpetuity of his domestic religion, and fugitive Gods, and desolate shrines. One must have the heart of a critic, to refuse a few frail tears or sighs to such powerful feelings as these. How often, indeed, is our sensibility melted by the mere harmony and melancholy modulation of words—by a passage of history, by poetry chanted in a sad and soothing strain! It is

true, great men do not attempt, like Richard the Second, to wear themselves graves in the earth by dropping tears upon it; such conceits being mere absurdity; but they are accessible to all the calls of the nobler passions.

We know little of Homer, but much of his early life appears to have been spent in travelling. The imperfect impressions of scenes and objects which he might have received from the relations of others, were not such as could satisfy a mind like his, which thirsted to immortalize the very soil upon which he trod. He had no resource but in travelling; and it would seem, that in the little adventurous barks of those ages, he had plowed the "immeasurable sea," in numerous voyages, before he commenced his poems. The heart is elated and inspired with a powerful enthusiasm by the sight of new countries and unknown seas: the adventurer feels as if transported out of the every-day world, and values himself, not for what he sees, but for the feelings with which it is beheld. It will be granted that the modish voyager, who should be carried round the world in a ship, would be nothing the better or the wiser for it; but the man of genius would carry back the suavity of nature in his soul; he would hold communion with the great deep, and imbibe a portion of its sublimity. For this reason every



truly great mind has a thirst for travel. Caring little for the raree-shows of corrupted states, such a mind delights to lose itself among ruins and deserts, and strange shores, and mariners, and savage tribes; it loves to be separated by vast distances from home—for the consciousness of remoteness is itself a pleasure—and to approach again by degrees the sacred and venerated spot.

Such are the motives which carry genius abroad; and although they be stronger and fresher in youth, they never very sensibly decay, for great minds do not grow old. Their passions are rather nicely adjusted and balanced than weakened or subdued by time; they learn to will and desire with more art and method, and not with less force or vivacity. The seeming wavering and inconstancy which appear in their early habits, are no more than the efforts of the mind to discover what is the most congenial to itself, and resemble the trembling of the magnetic needle, while gaining its true position. Nothing is of more steady temper than genius, but only so far as regards the end; it may be permitted, without charge of fickleness, to search amongst infinite relations what is best fitted to forward its designs. Its whole existence is one piece, and not made up of the shreds and ruins of actions, like that of ordinary persons. Like a hunter, it spends the

dawn of day in preparing for the chase, and is a-field early, lest the fine scents of things should wear away beneath the sun. From that moment its pursuit of the game is incessant, and when evening comes, it retires with unabated appetite from a finished field.

It is no easy matter to discover what one is fit for; and there are few but the greatest minds who arrive at an early conviction that they are not fit for every thing. From instinct the imagination is hurried away by a blind craving after infinite knowledge, and it requires great powers of judgment and self-denial to make choice of the right path, and to persevere in it to the end. Of this path, those who meditate great designs never lose sight; their little excursions are all made along its side, and serve to enliven and diversify the way. But if they wander too far; if they forget the original direction, they are undone. Like a traveller who has a given distance to perform in a stated time, they lengthen by every delay the space to come, and shorten the time in which it is to be accomplished, until at length difficulty annihilates their enthusiasm. But this conclusion always springs from an imperfect taste. The beauty and uniformity of one simple course is not enough for all minds; some delighting in a Gothic mixture of accessory stimu-

lants with the primary energy, and storing their minds, like a virtuoso's cabinet, with all manner of heterogeneous knowledge. *To know* is enough for them; they deal chiefly in wonder and extravagance, and make up by a multiplicity of emotions for the absence of all those which are vigorous and permanent.

But the simple structure of a great mind is raised on very opposite principles. It is one vast range of continuity and harmonious proportion; its parts adhere together from natural affinity, and cementing, and striking root into each other (if we may vary the metaphor,) form one beautiful and prolific whole. For well-harmonized knowledge has this advantage also over the other, that it is productive and lasting in its operation.

But if we observe narrowly the history of those pretended men of genius, who by some unknown fatality arrive at a kind of dominion over the taste of their times, but afterwards sink gradually into oblivion, we shall perceive that they succeeded in deceiving their contemporaries by an arrogant self-confidence and seeming wisdom, and either violently flattered or abused all ruling prejudices and opinions. Either of these methods is a sure passport to popularity; for the world is no such nice judge of merit as is pretended, but

will either be obeyed wholly, or opposed. In the former case it feels its consequence increased; and in the latter it is staggered, and "turns tail." For having adopted its own conclusions without examination, it is secretly conscious of weakness, and disposed to believe that every daring theorist who swims against the stream, must have looked more deeply into the nature of things, and reached purer and more sublime heights of speculation, than it can pretend to have done.

It is not to be denied that genius has sometimes sported with this failing, and thrown out monstrous systems upon which it might spend its fury. But even in this conduct there has been a hidden ulterior design. The kernel of truth has been concealed in the rough and forbidding husk of theory, and left to float upon the waters for the gathering up of some kindred discerning spirits. Systems, whether bad or good, were, in antiquity, the watch-towers from which great minds hailed each other's beacons in the night of ages; and it is far from being certain that genuine day has yet opened upon the world. We stand in need of systems still, for it is probable that truth lies incased in some one of them; and we must open all before we be sure which are the empty ones.

As far as regards the affairs of life, there can in

reality be little distinction induced by superiority of mind; for all persons are more or less within the influence of the society in which they live; and it becomes every man to conform, as far as virtue permits, to the manners of his times. Those persons, therefore, who expect to find the stamp of genius upon its every-day necessary intercourse and actions, expect, in fact, that a seal shall leave its impression upon water. Men are not the lords of circumstances; these flow round them in a resistless tide, and the utmost they can do is to note well its ebbing and flowing, that they may time their important enterprises according to its changes. It is the keenness with which it perceives these mutations, that renders genius so impatient of the dull co-operation of common persons, and makes its actions seem inconsequent and rash. This also furnishes us with a reason why people should make a false estimate of the actions of great men. If a writer produce one good book, they require him forthwith to write a hundred, that he may not be thought to have given birth to the other by chance. It was Addison, we believe, who observed of the schoolmen, that they had not genius enough to write a small book, and therefore took refuge in folios of the largest magnitude. We are getting as fast as possible into the predicament of the schoolmen.

No one knows when he has written enough ; but, like a player at chess, still goes on with the self-same ideas, merely altering their position. This must arise from early habits and prejudices, from having been taught to regard with veneration vast collections of common-places, under the titles of this or that man's *works*. Tacitus may be carried about in one's pocket, while it will very shortly require a waggon to remove Sir Walter Scott's labours from place to place. Voltaire's *facility* was his greatest fault ; better he had elaborated his periods, like Rousseau ; who, notwithstanding, wrote too much. The latter, however, of all modern writers, best knew the value of his own mind. His prime of life was passed in vicissitude and study. He did not set himself about writing books for mankind, until he knew what they possessed and what they wanted. It was his opinion, that a writer who would do any good should stand upon the pinnacle of his age, and from thence look into the future. Whoever, in fact, would be regarded in future times, must consider what may benefit them, and how he may bequeath a legacy to mankind which it shall be their interest to preserve. Hope of fame, without this care, is a mad expectation ; but with it, a certain and inviolable inheritance.

**PROGRESS**  
**OF**  
**CIVILIZATION AMONG THE PEOPLE.**





## CHAP. V.

### PROGRESS OF CIVILIZATION AMONG THE PEOPLE.

IT would require a nicely adjusted balance to weigh the ideas of the common people, so light and fugitive are they in their nature and duration. As, however, the affairs of life are considerably influenced by the degree and kind of knowledge possessed even by the multitude, to endeavour to determine the extent and quality of their notions cannot be deemed a useless speculation. It appears to us that a very erroneous estimate has been made as to the quantity of intellectual wealth supposed to be, at this moment, diffused among the common people; and that very injudicious methods have in consequence been taken for completing the culture of their minds. The natural order of proceeding seems to have been reversed. Instead of being led from known to unknown; from things suitable to their capacities, to such as require labour and contention of mind to comprehend; they have from the beginning been

brought in contact with metaphysical subtleties, which it would not be uncharitable to suppose beyond the comprehension, sometimes, of their teachers themselves; and thus, instead of being enlightened, (which is the object professed to be desired by their masters,) they acquire a string of sonorous terms, that have, in their mouths, no meaning whatever. But, as all persons are willing to believe that what they have acquired with much labour is worth something, the people are not backward in giving themselves credit for wonderful subtlety, supposing that to force a confused multitude of other men's thoughts through the mind, is *to think*. Accordingly many are deceived by the confidence, and seeming conviction, with which the common people put forth their opinions; and the belief gains ground, that knowledge, like the sun, has pierced through the upper surface of society, and, sinking gradually into its bosom, ripened, amidst dross and darkness, the ore that lay hidden at the bottom. This error is flattering, but it is prejudicial to mankind. It tends to relax the energies of those who labour to let in light upon the Tartarus of shades and chimeras, that still holds possession of the vulgar mind; it gives them the air of the Knight of La Mancha warring on the windmills, and shames them into indolence. But experince and observation at length convince

us that the people have very little exact knowledge. They have been taught many things. Their imaginations have been carried into the land of opinion, where shadows flit about with the appearances of reality; where mist and uncertainty pervade every thing; and where truth (if any truth be there) wears an impenetrable veil, never to be raised for a moment by human reason. Opinion, as Plato observed very justly, is something between knowledge and ignorance, and resembles the dim light of dawn, while it is yet doubtful whether it be night or day. It is the mind's dress, and changes with the times. Nor are those who affect to be above the vulgar less mutable in this respect than they; for as they adopt new fashions in their dress, as soon as their former taste has obtained general approbation, (a proof of excellence, it seems, in other matters,) so also do they discard their opinions when they become common, and resort to new, strange, or absurd tenets, which have not been soiled by vulgar belief. But the common people encroach so rapidly upon the great, in this particular, that very shortly the latter will be compelled, if they would still be singular, to strip their minds naked, and have no opinion at all.

To return—It is not clear to us what advantage thinking persons can promise themselves from the

belief which they so earnestly inculcate, that the people are highly civilized, and deeply imbued with the principles of useful knowledge. It seems to be an opinion, taken up without examination, and believed, because, as we said before, it is pleasant and flattering to the mind. But no one has ever stepped out of his grade in society, and conversed with those above him or below him, without perceiving that prejudices are suspended, like festoons, on every step of the long ladder of human life, and that each person thinks those the most beautiful which ornament the one on which he stands. The rankest weeds, however, are considered nose-gays at the bottom of the ladder, and their poisonous effluvia are snuffed up as complacently as if they were the richest and purest odours. This is apparently the condition of man's nature: he is fond of mysteries, of wonders, of things that raise strong emotions; and, because, upon the dead level of common life, he finds none of these things, it is his weakness to seek them in the mists of the past or future, in which every thing is magnified, distorted, or hidden from his view. Knowledge emancipates but a small portion of mankind from the tyranny of this propensity, the greater part continuing in ignorance and uncertainty—

“As wander travellers in woods by night,  
By the moon's doubtful and malignant light.”

Philosophers appear to have been sometimes deceived in their views of the common people, by taking up their notions of them from the graceless *canaille* of the metropolis. Such of the latter, as surround them, readily discover their aversion to prejudice and superstition, and learn to affect a freedom from both, which they do not feel, and quickly hasten to shake off in the genial company of their equals. People frequently deceive themselves also upon this point, and only then discover their own weaknesses, when some strong or sudden blast of misfortune has shaken off the false covering of their minds. Then they relapse into superstition, and sip the grateful cup of prejudice and boundless belief, without restraint.

It is not denied that the great have the same weaknesses at bottom. Catherine de Medicis, a woman of strong mind, and profoundly versed in the arts of policy, was, nevertheless, so far a slave to error and the cant of the times, as to believe she might ward off misfortunes by a certain charm, written in cabalistical characters on the skin of a dead-born infant, which she used to wear about her person. The infatuation of Kings, for the reveries of judicial astrology, is well known; and it is clear from many recent examples, that the growing knowledge of all the rest of mankind has had no influence upon them.

But the errors of the people, up to this moment, are innumerable, and as whimsical as they are various. Every county in the realm teems with superstitions of its own growth, which adroitly ally themselves to all creeds and persuasions, and literally defy civilization to root them out. A list of the principal of these would be curious, but does not come within the scope of the present chapter. One or two, however, may be mentioned, as they indicate a degree of civilization inferior to that of the Bedouin Arabs. When a ship is wrecked upon the shores of Wales, it is affirmed by the inhabitants that its *apparition*, previously visiting the spot, has most commonly been seen. Thousands of these spectre-ships hover about the coast in winter, their impassive sails shivering and straining in the tempest, and their decks manned with the spirits of those whom destiny is hurrying through the ocean to destruction. It would be vain to tell these superstitious people that beams, planks, masts, iron bolts, and cordage, can have no soul; they *believe*, but cannot analyze their notions; and therefore suppose that the word *ship* denotes a being which, while it continues whole, has some kind of spirit attached to it; and this, they imagine, goes before it to the place of shipwreck. In the same belief is also involved another impossibility—(unless it be a

relic of that ancient Grecian opinion, which taught that man was a threefold being—a spirit—the spirit's aërial vehicle—and the body); for if the men's spirits were on board the spectre-ship, their bodies would be tenantless in the real wooden tenement. An opinion, nearly akin to this, was entertained by the learned Earl of Roscommon, and countenanced by Dr. Johnson; but it may, perhaps, be enough to have mentioned it, in order to obtain it a place with that long list of ghosts, witches, predictions, &c. which an illustrious contemporary asserts to have been put to flight by the mere smell of printer's ink. We fear that they have not, however, been completely routed, but merely driven for a time to the under-cells of the human heart, to burst forth with fresh force when the torch of philosophy shall once more burn low and feebly. In plain truth, the germs of superstition and ignorance are indestructible: they are the indefinable fears, the incomprehensible forebodings, the false and delusive hopes which are indigenous to the heart of man. These are the monsters which he always hears, *sera sub nocte rudentes*; and which, when most completely overcome, only resemble the power of War, so nobly imagined by Virgil, confined in his own temple, but sitting upon brazen arms, and still meditating confusion and slaughter.

If then we admit that high and abstract metaphysical truth is, in their present condition, beyond the reach of the common people, shall we find them more capable of correct knowledge in other matters? in matters of fact, and political and natural rights? We shall see. Mankind are always supposed to yield, to such affairs as touch their interests, a very serious and steady attention, and to acquire, by that means, a full knowledge of their bearing and nature; but the interests of men are allowed to be most strongly affected by the degree of justice or injustice which enters into the administration of public affairs, and this cannot be known without a careful observation of the conduct and character of public men. It seems evident, however, that the people in general are either unwilling, or unable, to exercise their minds in such observation, being literally a flock, led to that or this intellectual pasture by the pipe of their shepherd. Of what is going forward, whether for their good or for their perdition, they know nothing; the mere husk of transactions is thrown before them by the newspapers, and by their *representatives* in Parliament; and it was the perception of the blind avidity with which this husk is devoured, that induced a great orator, in an unhappy moment, to denominate them *the swinish multitude!* Should the epithet be de-



served, where lies the blame? not, certainly, in the multitude. We are not, however, at present, seeking for matter of reprehension, but of fact; we would gain a clear conception of what the people *do know*; it may hereafter be our endeavour to show what they *ought to know*, and how it is to be taught them.

When a war with any neighbouring state is in progress, do the people ever know the true reason why it has been undertaken; the extent of means, and complexion of policy by which it is conducted; the losses and reverses suffered in battle; the probable chances of bringing it to a fortunate conclusion? Not one of these things do they know. They are, above all, kept in profound ignorance of the character of their enemy; while a factitious and absurd hatred of every inhabitant of the rival country, is fomented and nourished in their bosoms, and suffered to taint and embase the affections and charities of social life. For they proceed by degrees to hate every body whom they do not know; and it was by a process of this kind that the same word came, among the old Romans, to signify a *stranger* and an *enemy*. In remote country places the inhabitants of one village indulge a degree of this hatred towards those of the next hamlet, which has often been known to swell during *fairs*, or *merry makings*, into

actual violence. All these are the effects of ignorance.

If we contemplate a country life from a distance, we shall be apt to look upon it as the abode of sensibility and virtue; for the effect of a familiarity with nature, upon a fine intellectual capacity, is most desirable and happy. Farmers, labourers, and fishermen, however, who are much abroad among the elements, and frequently at those hours of the morning and night which seem best calculated to excite the imagination, and awaken the mental powers of mankind, are yet observed to be persons of blunt feelings, and coarse and rugged manners. The fisherman gathers nothing from the tossing or slumber of the dusky waves at midnight, but the lesser or greater probability of filling his nets; nor does the farmer contemplate any thing in the rich complexion of the morning in the perfumed season of spring, except such signs of the weather as may determine his stay a-field.

Very little better is the city artisan. He sees more, it is true, of the ways of men; but his sphere is merely *different*, not more enlarged. If the peasant becomes callous to the charms of nature through thoughtless familiarity, the artisan is not less sure to sink into the same state through mere desuetude. He feels out of his element the moment

he leaves the smoke of the city, wandering in most insipid rurality amidst the chant of birds, or the dusk whispers of the wood. He has heard that Nature is beautiful, and therefore will not fail to speak a word in praise of her rich hues and sunny landscapes ; but at the bottom of his heart there lurks a far stronger predilection for a fine tap-room fire, a snug seat, and a can foaming with ale. Nor is he altogether singular in this preference ; for men of high intellectual capacities have been known to indulge sentiments very little more refined ; and, to speak the truth, this consequence results naturally from the general tenor of a city life. Hunting, objectionable in most other points of view, might have a good effect upon persons in danger of falling into a taste of this kind, as its rapid vicissitudes infuse a species of vigour into the human character. It was, indeed, observed by Hippocrates, more than twenty-two centuries ago, that the Asiatic nations were weak and effeminate, because they passed their lives in a dull, uniform manner, ignorant, and incapable of that energetic state of mind, maintained by vicissitudes, which is always prepared for the worst. The manners of most modern nations are subject to the same objection. Their sameness tends to weaken the mind ; for our life is a long calm which unfits us for the tempests to which

we are all liable. Private adversities, indeed, are productive of some changes; but they rarely create a great character. Men connect themselves by so many relations to society, and are upheld by so many artificial props, that they are not often driven to depend upon their own resources. Sometimes, however, all the connecting links are snapt asunder, and then the naked character is displayed, bending to the blow of fortune, and sinking into hopeless oblivion and beggary; or firmly withstanding every shock, and, like Antæus, rising up stronger from each successive overthrow. But, in general, we are accustomed to move for ever in the same track, and are amazed and confounded if forced at any time to go aside into a new one; through which helpless condition of our minds it happens, that we are ready to put ourselves under the guidance of any one who promises security and ease.

This state of society is always induced when an agricultural people have long been gathered together in large cities. When a nation first evinces an inclination to pass from rural labours into the tracks of trade and commerce, the nobles are observed to linger awhile, in feudal pride, about their castles; by degrees it becomes apparent that the materials and instruments of luxury are more accessible among the rich plebeians of the cities;

and the nobles divide their time between a town and country life : at length the court and the city predominate in their affections, and they never fly to the shades of their own domains, unless when driven to them by fashion or chagrin.

In the first stage of these changes the nobles possess nearly all the knowledge afloat in the realm ; in the second, they waver between superiority and equality ; but in the third, the tables are turned, they are become decidedly inferior, and knowledge, like virtue, is seen to reside in the "golden mean." An old French poet, quoted by Sainte-Palaye in his *Memoirs on Ancient Chivalry*, observes that, in the middle ages, the study of the liberal arts was prohibited to the common people ; but that, in process of time, the nobility, ruined "*par les excès de la gourmandise et autres,*" had abandoned learning to the vulgar, who thereby quickly gained the ascendancy, and enslaved them in their turn.

"Car chevaliers ont honte d'estre clerks."

A very singular effect, however, seems to take place, when the common people are supposed to possess a certain degree of knowledge. In every thing, when they choose to become competitors with the smaller number, their vast majority must inevitably ensure them the victory : when, there-

fore, they invade the domain of knowledge, the magnates of the land must bow down before them, humour their caprices, and conform to their whims and opinions. But as their ideas seldom soar to the heights of art, the scale of excellence must be lowered to meet their views; and hence arise common-place, repetition of truisms, a trifling, and, in all respects, subdued tone of perfection. This truth, so bitter to the palate, so perplexing and unmanageable an ingredient to those who would administer it, is, in consequence, concealed; and those who chew it in secret, like a forbidden drug, only irritate and inflame their minds to very little purpose.

All the while it is, notwithstanding, certain, that the common people are *capable* of very correct and extensive knowledge. What stands between it and them, is the spirit of our political institutions; through which it happens that their better hours are always spent in labour, which is productive, to them, of nothing further than the means of labouring on to the end of life. This incessant occupation of the body in severe toil, has a sure tendency to weaken the thinking principle, and consequently to increase credulity, and a disposition to be deceived. Accordingly, the people show a fondness for imposture of every kind; which once made a certain Cardinal Legate

exclaim "*Puisqu'il veut être trompé, qu'il le soit!*" The definition of the political art, also, as it was given by a Bishop, "*ars non tam regendi, quam fallendi hominem,*" is an unequivocal proof that the clerical politicians, at least, look upon man as an animal that is to be governed by his ignorance and incapacity to discover deception. It is not, indeed, to be denied that mankind may always be overreached by interested cunning; but an intellectual people will at least have the satisfaction of being duped by none but able men. This was generally the case when the citizens of the ancient republics were outwitted. It was some credit to their judgment to be deluded by such fine politicians as Peisistratus, Cæsar, or Augustus; as it showed how high men were obliged to reach, who aimed at any thing above their capacity. The intellectual powers of a people may, in fact, be correctly estimated by the degree of cunning necessary to keep them in subjection, taking into the account the length or shortness of the time they have been enslaved; because force may compel a people to submit for a season to governors nearly destitute of ability; though nothing short of real stupidity and incapacity to reason, can chain them, through a series of ages, to the footstool of ignorant power. To judge of the French by their

present government,\* we might be led to think that all the germs of liberality, sown in the Encyclopedic era, had perished in the land; and that Legitimacy, like a poisonous plant, had overshadowed and destroyed all wholesome thinking. But there is room for believing that the faculties of the French people are merely bound up in a kind of frost, which may melt before the heat of vicissitudes, and carry away in its thaw the abomination which has disgraced the land. The nature of tyranny in Austria appears, however, to justify the old prejudices of almost all European nations against the German character. A jocular observation, applied by Balzac to the girls of some village in France, that they were too stupid to be seduced by a sensible man, seems strictly applicable to the Germans: they have never been able to produce, and appear never to have needed, a subtle tyrant; coarse despotism has been enough for them, and they have not spurned even the living madman who has openly uttered his contempt of knowledge. The savages who inhabited the woods of ancient Germany, as described by Tacitus, appear to have been actuated, like all other

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\* This was written several years ago, during the Villele administration. The "Three Days' Revolution" has partly shown the correctness of the view here taken of the French people.



savages, by an instinctive dislike of restraint; but it seems vastly incorrect, to say no more of it, to apply the epithet *free* to such animal aversion to slavery. They were free only in the sense in which wild beasts may be denominated free; for, properly speaking, they had not then been consolidated into society. This being considered, it is a high compliment that we pay ourselves when we assert that our "matchless Constitution" took its rise in the woods, among the ignorant savages of ancient Germany.

To revert, however, to our proposition: the great secret of promoting ignorance among the common people, *is to multiply frivolous amusements*. This it was which struck that profound observer of human nature, who remarked that "Shows and Bread" were all that the people demanded of their governors; for, in varying these *Shows*, and in perplexing the vulgar mind respecting the means by which this *Bread* is secured, consists all the art of tyrannical policy. It may be observed, too, that whenever a spark of knowledge, escaping from the great political furnace, is borne amongst that inflammable material, the popular mind, there are never wanting certain mercenary sophists to follow it, who, if they cannot extinguish, can at least give it the direction of an *ignis fatuus*, to lead the populace into error.

This process is busily going forward at the present moment. The people are taught *this*, and are taught *that*; but are never informed how they may teach themselves to discover what is best for them.

At the first view we are apt to consider it as something very extraordinary that the founders of fanatical sects find it so easy to insinuate themselves into the good opinion of the people; but if we weigh the matter, it will appear to deserve little wonder; for the whole process reduces itself to the replacing of a worn-out, indistinct opinion, by one that is new. This, among persons of little thought, is not difficult; for the mind is naturally averse to inaction, and easily persuades itself that to be in motion, is to make some approaches towards truth. And what motion is like that in which it is carried along by the boiling current of enthusiasm! An old philosopher taught that happiness was to be found only in the exercise of virtuous energies; and we are constrained, by daily observation, to believe that all mankind so far agree with him as to conceive the exercise of some energies necessary to its acquisition. Hence are we fond of change, and impatient of the present. We hope in a fresh position to discover more easily the texture of our fortunes, and escape from the *ennui* which we have found to adhere to

us through all former vicissitudes. We spring, therefore, on a new opinion, as upon a plank that promises to bear us safe to land, from among our shipwrecked hopes and projects; and with this fresh stay, are content to be driven forward anew before the gale of destiny. In the decay of empires this disposition grows very general among the common people. They are placed on the extreme circumference of a vast wheel, whose motion is every moment dying away; and, as this motion is necessary to their adhesion, they naturally experience alarm as it decreases, and fly off altogether when it ceases. In this stage of society they resemble the fasting Jews, watching the appearance of the stars upon the mountains; as daylight sinks imperceptibly in the west, their attention becomes more hushed, though their appetite sharpens within; and the first lamp which night suspends upon her battlements, is the signal for the close of inaction, and the commencement of Bacchanalian riot. From this cause sprang the horrors of the French Revolution, as well as the carnage which accompanied the fall of the Roman empire; and the same principles, operating the same effects, will be the cause why all nations shall submit to change, and why the common people, wanting the connecting principle of knowledge, must always form the elements of the destruction of states,

and of every mutation that takes place in human society.

From what has been said, it seems to result that civilization makes but a slight impression on the general mind, something like the ridges which the receding sea leaves upon the sand; and that when any great mutations having a tendency to embase a nation happen, the common people easily lose every impression of knowledge, and sink back into barbarism, as if it were their natural condition.

## IMAGINARY SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT.



## CHAP. VI.

### IMAGINARY SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT.

The name of More shall remain constant and in honour, by his famous Utopia.—PAULUS JOVIUS.

MANY books which are not much read by the generality, acquire, notwithstanding, a sort of shadowy fame in the world, from being associated in men's minds with some peculiar strain of doctrine, so that the idea of that doctrine brings up the idea of the books, and causes them to be mentioned in the conversations and writings of many who know them only by name. Thus we often hear of Aristotelian notions and Platonic ideas from persons who, if two opposite dogmas of philosophy were advanced in their hearing, would not be able to decide which had proceeded from the Lyceum, and which from the Academy. This arises not so much from vanity, as from the habit, now quite fashionable, of talking about every thing, whether one understands it or not. We dare say our readers have frequently heard of

*Utopian schemes, Utopian notions, Utopian politics,* &c., from persons who did not know very accurately the etymology of the adjective they used, and who were innocent of all acquaintance with the celebrated performance of Sir Thomas More. We have ourselves been guilty of this random sort of talking; but it at length occurred to us, some years ago, that it might be as well to look into the 'Utopia' itself, and see the mint where so many wonderful absurdities had been coined. From the very commencement, it was clear we were not pursuing the speculations of an ordinary mind; but were moving among the visions, if they are visions, of exalted genius, in which the most beautiful moral landscapes, refreshed and illumined by the mild air and bright beams of philosophy, spreading on all sides like golden exhalations, rose before the mental eye, and made upon the fancy impressions never to be erased.

We had long before read, in a cursory manner, those exquisite dialogues of Plato, entitled 'The Republic;' but not having them at hand, when we went through the 'Utopia,' it was not in our power to compare the views of the two writers; though, as far as we remembered, they appeared to have many points of resemblance. We thought also that we could trace, in the work before us, the original hints of many later produc-



tions, especially of Lord Bacon's 'New Atlantis,' and of Bishop Berkeley's 'Gaudentio di Lucca.' Bacon seems, however, to have felt that this kind of invention was not his forte, for his 'New Atlantis' was never completed. Berkeley finished his design, but his 'Gaudentio' will bear no comparison with the 'Utopia.' He had, in truth, a mind far less original and philosophical than Sir Thomas More's; and, if we are not greatly mistaken, - was less learned. In virtue, perhaps, both were equal; but their virtues did not resemble: Berkeley's were mild, gentle, almost effeminate; there was a great portion of Stoicism, of fierce, rugged, haughty, self-sufficiency in those of More. Accordingly, the speculations of Berkeley are gilded by a soft but brilliant enthusiasm; while in More's, a soberer fancy is discernible, with a much stronger likeness to truth.

In fact the 'Utopia' has, perhaps, never been equalled, as a philosophical romance, except by the relations of Gulliver; which, having been moulded for very peculiar purposes, reject all comparison, and stand up in the world of literature a species by themselves. In them, the interest hinges upon an individual, whose adventures all along appear the main object, while the manners and customs of the strange nations he visits, though minutely described, seem to be brought

before the eye incidentally, as they happen to bear a relation more or less remote to the hero of the narrative. Had Sir Thomas More adopted a similar method, the popularity of his 'Utopia' would have been far greater, as the fable would have been more complete and beautiful. No series of adventures, confined within the bounds of possibility, and represented as happening to one individual, can ever be too extravagant to excite admiration, and obtain a mitigated kind of belief; for as no one knows what is falling out daily to some of our species, within the vast circle of society, all are ready to lend an ear to a revelation of individual experience, acquired in remote parts of the world, or in any part where they have not the means of observing for themselves. When the greater portion of the globe was unknown, fiction might be as bold to create imaginary countries and nations, as now to create imaginary individuals, provided it preserved some show of probability; but since science has curtailed the realms of ignorance so thoroughly, invention must alter her track, and no longer dare to take any liberties with the map of the world. In Sir Thomas More's times, the recent discovery of America excited wonderful expectations: "space may produce new worlds" was the word; and, in reality, as navigation pursued her researches, the terraqueous globe

seemed to swell and enlarge its circumference like a bubble. The 'Utopia' was, therefore, built upon the general feeling, and, geographically, did not in the least outrage probability.

The author having been sent ambassador into Flanders, to settle and compose certain differences between his master, Henry VIII., and the Emperor Charles V., met at Antwerp with a curious Portuguese traveller, who had visited most parts of the world, and meditated much upon what he had seen. This traveller's name was Raphael Hythloday. He was introduced to Sir Thomas More by Peter Giles, a very pleasant citizen of Antwerp, to whom the 'Utopia' was afterwards addressed by the author. Raphael, it seems, had sailed to the new world with Americus Vesputius; and, as our great countryman was inquisitive about every thing relating to remote countries, a remarkable intimacy immediately grew up between him and the Portuguese. Their minds were congenial, and their studies had been nearly the same; both having addicted themselves almost entirely to the perusal of the Greek writers, whose notions, the author observes, are more bold and original than those of the Romans. In a word, Raphael, in the 'Utopia,' is Sir Thomas More himself, whose dual existence is kept up during the whole of the first book, that the author, like a

dramatic writer, may escape from censure through his interlocutors.

There is an air of simplicity, quite natural, in the conversations which introduce the main subject; though the author takes occasion very early in the work to exhibit his republican principles. But he does this without any appearance of design, merely by making Peter Giles inquire of Raphael why he did not enter into the service of some prince, and by that means exert his great wisdom and abilities for the good of mankind, as well as of himself and his friends. The comprehensive views, the depth, energy, and acuteness, of an upright and experienced statesman, animated by an honest indignation against tyranny, are conspicuous in Raphael's replies; for Peter presses the question, and the dialogue is carried on. Princes, he observes, are incapable of comprehending the obligations of their office; have, and can have, no regard for justice; are not, by any force of eloquence or prudence, to be enlisted on the side of liberty; but are inveterately disposed to prefer, on all occasions, the flattery and base principles of their courtiers, to the noble counsels of a philosopher. To be in the service of a prince, he continues, is to be a slave, to forfeit the privilege of speech, and to be bound to execute blindly the most pernicious commands. He holds that all

kings are, to a man, ambitious; more desirous of robbing their neighbours of their dominions, than of governing their own realms with equity; and, in all respects, stubborn, self-willed, and impracticable.

In pursuing this topic, Raphael sketches incidentally the character of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury; and he does it with a vigorous, expressive brevity, not unworthy of Tacitus. Morton, it seems, was a man of a shrewd comprehensive mind, patient of innovation, and anxious for the popular good. In a conversation which took place at his table, on the severity of the criminal law, we discover, through the medium of the Portuguese phantom, Raphael, the opinions of Sir Thomas More upon capital punishment; and it appears that he had, in great part, anticipated the humane notions of the present age. He traces the prevalence of thieves to the vices of monarchical governments, to excessive taxation and war, which impoverish the body of the people, and nurse a great number of desperate idle fellows, who, on the re-establishment of peace, are let loose, like so many wild beasts, upon society. Taxation, he observes, is rendered excessive for two purposes: to enrich the coffers of the prince, and to break the spirit of the people by extreme poverty. Had this truth been uttered

by a speculative reasoner, from *à priori* induction, it might deserve, perhaps, to be disputed; but here we have it from the mouth of a Lord Chancellor of England, a man of a clear head, great learning, and vast experience of affairs; who did not gather the fact from hearsay, but had it beaten into his mind by daily and hourly experience. It may, therefore, be considered a political axiom, that princes in general will levy taxes even when their coffers are overflowing; and that, not so much for the sake of the money, as of impoverishing and depressing the people.

Thieves are multiplied, also, by the institutions of an hereditary nobility; for, besides the enormous portion of wealth they engross, and draw up into heaps, out of the hands of the people, their houses are so many nurseries of robbers; their attendants literally forming an army of idlers, who are draughted off, occasionally, to scour the highways and supply the gallows.

His opinions on standing armies are not less bold and striking: under whatever pretence they may be maintained, whether as a defence from foreign invasion, or as a curb to sedition at home, the true aim of their being kept up, he observes, is tyranny and arbitrary rule.

On all these subjects, his observations are the fruit of deep reflection and experience, and though

many of them may not at present appear new, they are all worthy of attention ; and sometimes send out, through rents, as it were, in the veil of fable which envelopes them, flashes of truth, which are much more brilliant than they would appear in a didactic political work ; as the sun's rays fall warmer when they burst at intervals between the clouds, than when the sky is entirely clear. But, in fact, this whole book, introductory to the portraiture of the Utopian commonwealth, is full of noble thoughts and sentiments, clothed in that rich, marrowy eloquence, which springs from extensive observation and copiousness of ideas. Nothing is forced, or introduced for the sake of ostentation ; or, when introduced, pursued too far out of the road : the topics rise out of each other naturally and beautifully, as branches spring from a tree, lopped and pruned into graceful proportion, and loaded with fruit of the richest show and flavour.

If it be the intention of philosophy to diffuse cheerfulness and serenity through the mind, the reader of the ' Utopia ' will infallibly be persuaded that its author was a true philosopher ; for it is quite impossible to make the smallest progress among his speculations without feeling a tranquillizing enlivening influence, penetrating like sunshine into the mind, and dispelling the clouds



and darkness of solicitude and discontent. This is the great charm of his book, as it was of his character. There is nothing sour or crabbed to be met with in it ; no moroseness, no affectation ; it is like a pleasant companion whom one picks up by the way-side, who, by appearing to slide into our humours, delights and enchants us ; and, if he has any grand ideas, opens, with a smile, a passage for them into our understanding. An author of genius enshrines his soul in his book, which thus becomes a fane whence he may utter his oracles, like a god, to all eternity ; and thus his opinions and sentiments rest upon a surer basis than the Delphian tripod : no mutation of empire can disturb his influence, nor any change of religion. Plato speaks still, though Apollo has long been mute. A great writer appears to be one of the mouths of nature, whose revelations men of all creeds would reckon it impiety to neglect ; and such a writer is Sir Thomas More.

Perhaps the free nature of More's speculations has tended to restrain their diffusion among mankind, for he makes free with every body's prejudices : kings, nobles, and priests, are the theme of his censure ; and, as he never censures unjustly, his reprehension has the bitterer sting. For the rich in general he had very small respect, as he



considered the accumulation of wealth a species of monopoly, which it should be the business of just laws to restrain. It is rather surprising, considering the manner in which he speaks of the priesthood, that his religion has never been called in question ; for if he ever goes out of his way on any occasion whatever, it is to express his disrespect and contempt for the priests. They were in his time, he says, a race of men, who, not content with leading an idle life, were resolved to do mischief ; to stop the course of agriculture, enclose grounds, and destroy houses and towns, *reserving only the churches, that they might lodge their sheep in them*. In one passage he appears to call in question the justice of Providence for sending the rot among the sheep, which it ought to have inflicted, he thought, upon the owners themselves. Add to this, the ludicrous colloquy between the friar and the jester, at the archbishop's table, in which he puts such bitter taunts and sarcasms into the jester's mouth, and makes him goad and harass the friar so effectually, that any one may perceive he is contriving, "*mutato nomine*," to utter his own sentiments.

But perhaps the boldest passage in the 'Utopia' is that in which the author ventures to delineate the court and policy of Henry VII., the father of the prince he served ; for the arts by which that

monarch contrived to fill his coffers and impoverish his people, are there stigmatized as base, knavish, hypocritical, and inexpressibly unjust. The reader who is acquainted with Lord Bacon's life of that prince, will find no difficulty in recognising in Sir Thomas More's terrible epitome, the genuine history of the period ; he therefore will suspect that Bacon has given but very faintly some of the features of the times.

By degrees the question of property is introduced : Raphael maintains, that in a well-regulated state, men should have all things in common ; and as in the course of the discussion he frequently refers, in proof or illustration of his positions, to the laws and customs of the Utopians, a people he had visited during his travels, he at length excites the curiosity of his companions, who request to know something more particular of that singular and unheard-of nation. The traveller, of course, complies, and from his relation Sir Thomas More compiled his account of Utopia.

Perhaps there is an inherent defect in every picture of an imaginary government ; as, by piling up the wisest maxims and most important truths upon a scaffolding of palpable fable, we bring those maxims and those truths themselves into suspicion, with as many as cannot accurately distinguish between ideas and the husks in which

they grow. It must also be confessed, that there is some appearance of puerility in these inventions, which seem like an attempt to gild the pill of instruction before the reader's eyes, as though the author doubted he might not have the courage to take it, if not so disguised. This produces in many a disdain for this kind of writing ; but their disdain is not well-grounded ; for the writer may not have at all distrusted their capacity to follow and comprehend him, whatever method of instruction he might have chosen, but have given way to the temper of the times, or been directed in his choice of a mode by the danger of his own position. This we believe to have been the case with Sir Thomas More. He would have written no Utopias, could he have dared to speak his mind of England and its institutions, and to recommend such maxims of government as his great mind approved. As it is, we must take his thoughts where we can find them ; they are, to be sure, far less extraordinary now than when first published, and some of them may be absurd enough ; but we are much deceived if they are not altogether worthy of being well sifted and studied by mankind in general.

The description of Utopia commences in the beginning of the second book, with a sketch of the general appearance of the country, of the soil,

towns, and inhabitants. The island, it appears, contained fifty-four cities, large, well built, and much resembling each other. From one of these cities to the next, the distance was in no case more than a day's journey for a pedestrian, so that every traveller had it in his power to rest at night in the city. Amaurot, the metropolis, lay nearly in the centre of the island; and there all the deputies from the provincial senates, three from every city, assembled once a year to consult together about the great business of the state. All the citizens submitted in turns to the exercise of rural labour; a portion of the population being draughted off every year from the cities to work in the fields, and an equal number, who had been called to the country the year before, returning to the towns. By these means the people never dwindled into effeminacy by perpetual confinement, nor contracted those rugged manners which constant application to rustic labours is apt to generate. There was a gentleness and a refinement in their robust vigour which diffused over the whole intercourse of life a sweet amenity and a lively grace. In short, they resembled the elegant and urbane population of ancient Attica.

Their towns, like Mr. Owen's, were built in the form of a parallelogram; all the streets were of one width, and the houses exactly resembling each other.

Behind every dwelling was a fine garden, in which the vine, all manner of fruit-trees, and plants and flowers, were cultivated. The Utopian legislator seems, indeed, by the delight with which he speaks of trees, fruits, fountains, and the beauty of flowers, to have possessed the true philosophical taste for gardening and agriculture ; and he often indulges his benevolence by fancying his happy people seated every man under his vine, or under his fig-tree. To heighten the verisimilitude of his relation, he, on mentioning the structure of the capital, takes a short retrospect of its improvements, and observes that, from a collection of low and mean cottages, it had grown by degrees to consist of edifices, lofty, uniform, and superb.

The government was republican, and the prince, or president, elective ; but he continued in office during life, unless suspected of some design to enslave the people, in which case he was immediately removed. Suffrages were given in secret, and the senators chosen annually. Indeed, Sir Thomas More entertained the most entire affection for democracy, and contrives on all occasions to manifest his affection ; so that the whole scheme of his commonwealth turns upon the principle that government is valuable only in proportion as it provides for the general happiness.

The day was divided with great judgment among the Utopians: six hours out of the twenty-four were consumed in labour,—three in the morning, and three in the afternoon; eight were allotted to sleep; and the remaining ten to reading and recreation. Public lectures were delivered every morning, before day-break, in all the cities; but none were compelled to attend, excepting those marked out for literature. It was fashionable, however, for great numbers of both sexes to be present, each person attending the lectures most congenial to his taste.

To the Utopian division of time, the author foresaw there would be many objections, principally on the ground that too little was appropriated to labour. His reply to these anticipated objections is so full of truth and cogency, that we shall presume to lay it entire before the reader:

“But this matter of the time set off for labour, is to be narrowly examined, otherwise you may perhaps imagine, that since there are only six hours appointed for work, they may fall under a scarcity of necessary provisions. But it is so far from being true, that this time is not sufficient for supplying them with a plenty of all things that are either necessary or convenient, that it is rather too much; and this you will easily apprehend, if you consider how great a part of all other

nations is quite idle. First, women generally do little, who are the half of mankind; and if some few women are diligent, their husbands are idle. Then consider the great company of idle priests, and of those that are called religious men; add to these all rich men, chiefly those that have estates in lands, who are called noblemen and gentlemen, together with their families, made up of idle persons, that do nothing but go swaggering about. Reckon in with these, all those strong and lusty beggars, that go about pretending some disease, in excuse for their begging; and upon the whole account you will find, that the number of those by whose labours mankind is supplied, is much less than you did perhaps imagine. Then consider how few of those that work, are employed in labours that men do really need; for we who measure all things by money, give occasions to many trades that are both vain and superfluous, and that serve only to support riot and luxury. For if those who are at work were employed only in such things as the conveniencies of life require, there would be such an abundance of them, and by that means the prices of them would so sink, that tradesmen could not be maintained by their gains; if all those who labour about useless things were set to more profitable trades; and if all that number that languishes out their life in sloth and



idleness, of whom every one consumes as much as any two of the men that are at work do, were forced to labour, you may easily imagine that a small proportion of time would serve for doing all that is either necessary, profitable, or pleasant to mankind, pleasure being still kept within its due bounds."

There prevailed in Utopia a regulation respecting literary men, which might, with great advantage, be revived among many modern nations: the literati were constituted into a distinct class, exempt from labour, and honoured in a particular manner; but if any member of this class was, in the course of time, found to disappoint the expectations which had been formed of him, his privileges were annulled, and he was compelled to join the labouring classes. On the other hand, a mechanic, who chose to acquire, in his leisure hours, a certain portion of learning, and, besides, displayed a powerful and enlarged intellect, was immediately delivered from the necessity to labour, and ranked among the literati.

There was great singleness of purpose among the Utopians, for happiness was the object of their study. Their notions of happiness, too, were sufficiently simple, as they made it to consist entirely in pleasure,—in such pleasure as passes harmlessly over the mind, like a clear wave,



leaving no stain of sensuality behind it. To know how the delights of life arrange themselves in the scale of nature, and how we are to pass into the sphere of one without missing another, more precious perhaps, is a science far more valuable than the vulgar learned ever yet conceived. But if we make towards it through the right path, it is not difficult of attainment. Nature teaches it. We have but to listen patiently to her dictates. However, Sir Thomas More seems to have thought that the art of listening to nature was not easy of acquirement, and therefore he made it the chief object of study among the Utopians.

We must caution our readers against supposing for a moment that we profess to detail all the opinions or practices of the Utopians; it would be to extract the whole work, of which we are only giving an outline: the most we can do is, to select what appear to us the most extraordinary ideas, and even this is extremely difficult where so many ideas are extraordinary. However, we shall do our best. From the subject of study and domestic government, the author passes to the consideration of colonization and war, on the former of which his notions are especially remarkable. If one of two neighbouring nations happen, at any time, to have an overflowing population, while the other has not people enough to cultivate

the whole of its territory, the former, he thinks, has an undoubted right to occupy the waste lands of the latter, and, in case of opposition, to seize upon them by force of arms; "since every man," he continues, "has, by the law of nature, a right to such an uncultivated portion of the earth as is necessary for his subsistence."

The cities of the Utopians were divided into four equal parts, in each of which was a market-place, filled with all the necessities of life. From these, every father of a family took what he judged necessary for the subsistence of his house; and there was no danger that he would take too much, for what should he have done with it, since there was no money, and since every one had the same liberty as himself?

"It is the fear of want that makes any of the whole race of animals either greedy or ravenous: but besides fear, there is in man a vast pride, that makes him fancy it a particular glory for him to excel others in pomp and excess. But by the laws of the Utopians, there is no room for these things among them."

All the grown-up people of both sexes dined and supped in public, in spacious halls erected in every street. The sick were carefully accommodated in hospitals, built without the walls, where every delicacy was provided for them. But,

because in all countries many are found to prefer privacy and retirement, every one who chose might eat at home, that liberty might in no case be infringed. At the public halls, the men were placed on one side, the women on the other; and old and young were so skilfully intermingled on both sides, that the conversation was always lively and sportive, without degenerating into licentiousness.

“They never sup without music; and there is always fruit served up after meat. While they sit at meat, some burn perfumes, and sprinkle about sweet ointments and sweet waters; and they are wanting in nothing that may cheer up their spirits, for they give themselves a large allowance that way, and indulge themselves in all such pleasures as are attended with no inconvenience. Thus do those that are in the towns live together; but in the country, where they live at a greater distance, every one eats at home; and no family wants any necessary sort of provision, for it is from them that provisions are sent unto those that live in the towns.”

One of the strangest regulations of the Utopians was that which settled the mode of travelling, as it allowed no man to move out of his district without a passport, under the penalty of being returned to his parish as a rogue and vaga-

bond, and, for the second offence, reduced to slavery. This was to prevent idleness. They who travelled in the regular way, found in every town and city the most cordial welcome; but there were no "taverns, ale-houses, nor stews, among them;" conveniencies which no European nation has hitherto been able to dispense with. Legislators like Sir Thomas More, Lord Bacon, Bishop Berkeley, &c., who regulate the passions of Utopians, Atlantians, and Mezzoraneans, find small difficulty in banishing vice from their dominions, since they can do it with a stroke of the pen; but no lawgiver who has had to do with actual society, excepting Lycurgus, has ever, as far as we know, succeeded in banishing public prostitution from his country. Solon allowed it; it prevailed at Rome; it is tolerated in all Christian countries. Why is this? Is man incorrigible? Has he always been incorrigible, every where but at Sparta? Or was Lycurgus, as antiquity believed, really superior in genius to all other lawgivers, the opinion of Mr. Campbell\* notwithstanding? This foul blot upon all Christian governments seems to be caused by some radical defect in the institution of marriage, which damps the affections of the connubial state, and often throws back upon single

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\* See his 'Lectures on Poetry.'

life an ineradicable taint. Sir Thomas More and Lord Bacon seem to have perceived some traces of this defect, and the cause which produces it; and the former, with the bold candour which was natural to him, explained himself, and proposed what appeared to him a proper remedy. It is not so easy to come at Lord Bacon's sentiments on the subject; whether he sometimes laboured under that incapacity to unwrap and be delivered of his conceptions, which he imputed to Aristotle, or thought proper to utter some of his opinions in oracular sentences and phrases that might be turned towards any point of the compass. Be this as it may, we cannot, at present, enter into the subject, but must refer the reader to the 'Utopia' and the 'New Atlantis.'

Agreeably to the doctrine and practice of many ancient philosophers, Sir Thomas More inculcates suicide in certain cases; arguing that it is not only allowable, but religious and pious; and Bishop Burnet, his translator, can hardly be said to condemn it, for all he says on the subject is: "The advising men, in some cases, to put an end to their lives, notwithstanding all the caution with which he guards it, *is a piece of rough and fierce philosophy.*" No doubt it is, excellent prelate! But is it nothing more?

The author next ridicules our bulky laws;

and, to express his thorough abhorrence of lawyers, he imitates Plato's conduct towards the poets, and banishes them entirely from his commonwealth. He likewise censures the faithlessness of princes and popes, in a keen ironical manner; and exposes the wicked sophistry by which they set up one kind of virtue for themselves, and another for the people. To show how he respects them, he observes, that when the Utopians made war with any neighbouring nation, the first thing they did was to offer immense rewards to any one who would kill the hostile prince, or any of his courtiers; for to such they always attributed the causes of war. This barbarous practice, Bishop Burnet observes, "is so wild and so immoral both, that it does not admit of any thing to soften or excuse it, much less to justify it."

But the most singular chapter in the whole 'Utopia,' is that on religion, as it unveils, in a pretty clear manner, the workings of the author's mind. What, however, and how much, he believed, it is not easy to say, though the whole tenor of his work furnishes strong grounds for suspecting his orthodoxy. He makes a portion of his people bow down in adoration before the sun and moon, and great men of former times, "not only as ordinary deities, but as the supreme

God;" and, although he observes that the wiser portion of them adored the one incomprehensible divinity, he censures not those rude pagans for their polytheism, appearing to think it is no great matter what men worship. When Raphael and his companions explained the Christian religion to the Utopians, many of them came over to the new faith; but he observes, that one of these converts was so transported with an intemperate zeal, that he not only openly preferred his new creed, but abused and declaimed against the religions of the country; upon which he was seized and banished, not, says the author, for disparaging those religions, but for inflaming the people to sedition. It was generally upon the same pretext that the Roman emperors persecuted the primitive Christians, whom they considered bad citizens, as well as bigots. In strict conformity with the practice of the pagans of antiquity, the author of 'Utopia' teaches, that all religions should be equally tolerated, and that no man should, in any case, be punished for his opinions, unless he attempt to force them upon others. Like a philosopher of more modern times, he seems to suspect that, possibly, God may be pleased with a variety of religions; just as an indulgent father is pleased with the different fancies of his children, who, on returning from a

rural walk, present him, one with a curious pebble, another with a flower, a third with a beautiful feather, or shell, and so on; since each only adopts a different method of expressing the same love.

We have now gone through the 'Utopia' in a cursory manner, and have, we hope, shown that it is an extraordinary work,—a splendid recapitulation of all the philosophical meditations of its author's life, distinctly, forcibly, and beautifully arranged; that to pass from vulgar literature to such works, is like sailing out of the dull trade-winds, which always blow one way, into the free, changeable airs of the mighty ocean; and that, though it be commonly spoken of as a childish vision, there is very little of absurdity either in the matter or manner of the work. We have detailed its principles; we have spoken our opinion: let the reader judge.



**EFFECTS**  
**OF**  
**CIVILIZATION UPON GENIUS.**



## CHAP. VII.

### EFFECTS OF CIVILIZATION UPON GENIUS.

**AUTHORS** are a kind of spies, which society despatches into the regions of thought and contemplation, to observe the face of things, and to draw up correct reports of their discoveries. It falls to the share of some of them to observe but very little, and even that little with abundance of incorrectness and misapprehension. For this, many causes might be assigned; but the principal we take to be, a desire to discover in the regions which they examine, what those regions never contained, and (arising out of their consequent disappointment) a disposition to set off what they see, in false or inadequate colours. Nothing that has ever yet been made the subject of contemplation, has received such various treatment as man's passions and weaknesses, not one of which has escaped the panegyric and satire, balanced exactly against each other, of numerous

witty writers, according as they were inspired by cheerful or gloomy ideas. Among these passions or frailties of human nature, (we will not quarrel about their nomenclature,) we have observed that the teeth of reprehension have fastened with peculiar frequency and eagerness upon enthusiasm. Even philosophy has not appeared to disapprove of this; probably, because enthusiasm is presumed to act in opposition to her calm dictates, to pluck up what she has planted, overthrow what she has built, and piercing the soul, like the Phrygian measures of old, to excite a species of religious frenzy, which hurries men into extravagance and folly. We fear it must plead guilty to part of this charge. History testifies that it has been the cause of great disorders in the world; and we all know that it held up the light of false expectation to our youth, causing our fancy to scale heights, and our reason to make calculations, which a man sobered by adversity would be ashamed to dwell upon, even in his dreams. It is therefore granted to be the parent of much absurdity. But this concession, as the reader will observe, does not include an acknowledgment that enthusiasm never produces any good, or even that its effects are more mischievous than beneficent; nay, that, upon the whole, were an equal balance struck, we have any

greater reason to complain of it, than of the least harmful passion we possess. Let us consider it in its nature and effects. It is, as all allow, a magnanimous passion, strikes deep root even in a barren fortune, and is rarely to be overthrown by adversity. It is no parasite to be seen at the tables of the great. Heroes, projectors, founders of religions, poets, artists, and political reformers, are the men it smiles on and inspires. It is friendly, but not social; loves the *tête-à-tête*, but avoids the merry-making; breathes sometimes in a senate, but is the informing soul of a popular assembly. Public virtue lives and dies with it. It affects democracy, and produced all the glory of the Athenian commonwealth. In private life, it is the soul of love and friendship: you may reckon on an enthusiast as long as his enthusiasm lasts; he will never desert you, till he becomes quite another man. Nor is this change easily brought about, where the passion had firm root in the mind at first; for it is exceedingly fond of old associations, and turns back with a delight which is utterly indescribable to every thing that can recall its early hopes and joys. Poor men, who raise themselves above their original stations by any other means than mere sordid money-making, will all be found to have been enthusiasts in their way: they cherished some particular train of

ideas, by pursuing which up and down the world, they at length fell in with Mammon, and put their hands into his coffers. Enthusiasm has some natural affinity with greatness,—swells the desires and capacities of the soul, gives energy to the will, and daring to the hand, makes pastime of toil, and sheds a glory round the head of enterprise. Men of mere contemplation also possess it; but in them it is a purer and more temperate fire, and, like a well-trimmed lamp, burns on steadily to the end of life; by no means resembling the bickering torch-like blaze, in which the enthusiasm of the hero bursts forth. The poor student, who meditates on philosophy in his thatched cottage, may hide in his bosom the ambition and enthusiasm of an Alexander, but he conceals his passion with the ashes of learning, never suffering it to blaze forth, unless when his fancy is to be warmed and enlivened for some daring flight, or his resolves to be invigorated under the pressure of chilling adversity. If a man indulge himself with moderate solitude, especially in places abounding with woods and rivers, or near the sea shore, he may strengthen considerably his natural enthusiasm, which is apt to cool in cities, by too close a connexion with art. For this purpose it is that imaginative persons visit the ruins of antiquity, or spots rendered

famous by illustrious deeds, or by having been the habitation of great and wise men, as Thermopylæ, or Marathon, or Athens; nor can there be any doubt that the mind feels a new elevation in such places: no Englishman could tread the fields of Agincourt, of Cressy, of Poitiers, without experiencing a glow of enthusiasm, which would have been warmer and purer had it been recorded that the heroes who left their bones to whiten on those celebrated spots, had died in defence of man's freedom and rights. It is often thought that the disdain of worldly distinctions, ranks, and pleasures, expressed by persons really fond of retirement, is affected and hypocritical; but it may not be: they view the world from a distance, and it must needs follow that its concerns and troubles appear little and insignificant in their eyes. Let the busiest man in 'Change-alley be placed in the midst of a storm on the Atlantic, on the heights of the Andes, or in the interminable forests which stretch through the heart of America, and he will look upon the price of stocks as a matter of small importance. What such sublime scenes would do for him, is wrought in others by those sweet little patches of solitude that may be found in England. The vast machine of business, going round perpetually in this city, stuns and perplexes us with the noise of its movements: we gather

up our thoughts, and unwind our designs, as in a dream; nor does habit do any thing more than render our dreams less disturbed. The face of nature awakens us. On the banks of rivers, in the darkness of woods, our mind appears to gain its original serenity, and spreads before itself, in a kind of internal perspective, the whole tract of its thoughts and speculations. Over whatever arises, enthusiasm sheds a tinge of pleasantness, which braces the resolution, and stimulates it to new exertion. The passions, thus diverted from their objects for a moment, return to it with redoubled force; as the hammer strikes harder in proportion as it is lifted above the anvil.

No man ever performed any thing remarkable, who was not thoroughly possessed by enthusiasm; a passion compounded of desire, daring, and unquenchable energy. The want of it is denominated "poorness of spirit," as if it were the rich juice which fertilized the mind. Virgil was well persuaded of this, when he exclaimed,

"For they can conquer, who believe they can!"

Julius Cæsar was a great enthusiast, and believed that heaven and earth were interested in his success. His rival was doubtful, wavering, suspicious, had no dependence on fortune; in a word, was



“poor-spirited.” Youth, in general, possesses something of this passion, and to a certain point it holds out very well ; but at length, like a spent wave, it ceases, in the greater number, to buoy them up ; they turn a cold look upon the scenes of life, imagine the *moyens de parvenir* to be all exhausted, and sink into listlessness and hopelessness for the remainder of their existence. Man is a *Sybarite* in thinking : he loves to let his ideas remain in the order in which they entered his mind, and is naturally averse to rouse them into that ferment, in which they strike, as it were, of their own accord, into new channels. But this holds not with the enthusiast. His brain is the very furnace of invention : theories and novelties flit before his fancy like bees ; his soul is in an orgasm ; he stamps the mark of his intellect on words and notions, and pours out his riches before mankind. It is the want of this natural intoxication which drives men to the habit of drinking ; for when that pleasurable exaltation of mind, which enthusiasm produces, dies away with youth, leaving a mere dry matter-of-fact plodding *homo munculus* behind, what is there left to this miserable little personage with which to season life, but his dinner, his goblet, and his segar ? Real enthusiasts are sober, severe men, given, as Lord

Shaftesbury observes, rather to melancholy than to mirth; because, in the intervals of their vehement transports, there is an ebbing of the spirits, a recoiling of their physical energies, which makes the mind droop and seem bewildered for a season. In reading the histories of half-civilized nations, we have observed that men of this cast readily obtain co-operators among such people, in their designs and enterprises; and this, principally, because in those stages of society enthusiasts abound: and even the generality, from their manner of life, have minds less strongly tied down to modes and precedents, than afterwards in a more settled and advanced state of civilization. As the arts of life approach perfection, men begin to rely more upon those arts, and less upon themselves; their enthusiasm and energy, being seldom called forth, evaporate by degrees; the bold enterprising character becomes more rare; cunning takes the place of wisdom and courage; improvements in laws and arts come to be regarded as visionary; it is thought advisable "to let *well* alone," and to give up all hopes of *better*; philosophy and learning fall into disrepute; *royal roads* to knowledge are discovered, by which a man may master all the arts and sciences in a very short time: the human mind rests upon

these crutches, and when it comes to this, one is hardly sorry to observe the babblings of its dotage silenced by the terrors of a revolution.

It is humiliating to observe, how general a tendency there is in mankind towards the trifling and the little ; nine-tenths of the conversation of the world are expended on nobody knows what ; and millions live and die without ever knowing what it was to form an opinion, or possess an idea of their own. Nay, it sometimes happens that very dignified and honourable personages, whose smiles and frowns dispense more happiness than it is possible for us to conceive,—we say, it sometimes happens, that august personages of this description have no more original ideas than a drayman. Notwithstanding this, it is a settled maxim amongst us moderns, that the nonsense of such persons is infinitely more valuable than the wisdom of any other man whatever, and to think otherwise is looked upon as vastly impertinent. But the enthusiast is no respecter of persons : as all are equal in the sight of God, so are they in his sight ; the vehement transports of his benevolence, in which he has an eye to the good of all men, are not to be checked by ranks and titles ; he spurns them when they are perked up in his face instead of merit, and will have to see the man himself. Hence enthusiasm is rude, resembling,

not the ambling pony, which will stop and turn, and trot and gallop, as you please, but the untameable war-horse, "that pricketh his ears, that paweth at the sound of the trumpet, and listeneth not to the voice of his rider!" Under its influence, the soul is no longer passive to the inroad of ordinary conceptions; a divine breath appears to rouse some hidden nature, some bias to sublimity, some bright train of thought, as a vein of gold in the earth is sometimes uncovered by an earthquake. The man is rapt, lifted up, inspired. It is during such moments, that men fashion those designs and perform those actions, which are regarded, in their causes and nature, as something more than human: during such an access of enthusiasm, did Curtius drive his war-horse into the gulf, and Decius devote himself to the infernal gods, for the Roman people. Nor were their deaths unhappy; for their lives and enthusiasm were extinguished together. Had either of those brave men made a vow to devote himself a twelvemonth, nay, a month after, he would have been to be pitied; on coming to himself, he would have perceived the rashness of his vow; nature, which in the warm moment urged him on, would have deserted him on reflection; a thousand ties binding him to life, invisible in the blaze of passion, the calm light of reason would have dis-

covered ; his parents, his wife, his children, his friends, his hopes and expectations, would have assailed the sanctity of his vow — and instead of a willing sacrifice, he would have fallen a reluctant victim ! That such would have been the case, we have a strong proof in the behaviour of the Roman army, which was caught in the Forks of Caudium. Having marched incautiously into this dangerous defile, they discovered, on drawing near its further outlet, that it was closed with vast stones and trees, and, on marching back, found that the entrance also had been blocked up behind them by the enemy. The surrounding hills were high, of difficult access, and covered moreover with hostile troops. On perceiving their position, the soldiers were seized with a stupor, their courage failed them, their limbs trembled with terror ; and these men, whose business was war, no sooner lost their enthusiasm, than, like sheep, they gazed upon each other, yielded up their arms, passed under the yoke, and sneaked back to Rome in the lowest stage of dejection.

There is much less enthusiasm in countries under kingly government than is produced by republican institutions, as there is much less virtue and energy of every kind. Legislators have an eye, however, rather to peace than to

energy, believing, perhaps, that happiness is thereby more surely attained. But "the soul's joy," as the poet observes, "lies *in doing*," not in being hushed and calmed down to tranquillity; and, therefore, wherever man's energies, mental and bodily, are called most powerfully into action uncontrolled, or controlled only by the laws, there happiness is sure to be most generally and exquisitely tasted. At Athens the sovereign power was seated nominally and truly in the people, who in the course of one year enjoyed, in the exercise of it, a greater sum of happiness than can be conceived to be spread in a century over the hearts of any modern nation. That men generally believe they were great and happy is proved by this:—there is no man who has ever heard a rational account of their institutions who does not wish he had lived when those institutions flourished, unless he be one whose consciousness of demerit, or littleness of soul, assures him he would have made no figure among those great-minded men. Closet politicians, such as Hume, may be incapable of conceiving such a "mobbish government," to use his own paltry and disgraceful expression, but men of nobler minds will be able, without half his learning, to comprehend and value it as it deserves. The happiness and glory of our own country have

been in proportion to our treading in the steps of Athens, and if they have fallen short, it is only where we have fallen short of her example.

In private life we have a less glowing enthusiasm than the Greeks and Romans, which may be owing, perhaps, to the character of our religious belief, the tendency of which is to deaden the intensity of our affections for all terrestrial things,—our country, our wives and children, and our friends. “Life,” said the Pagans, is not *to live*, but *to be happy!*” Their happiness, too, consisted in performing mere worldly virtues, patriotism, justice, beneficence, neglecting or condemning the monkish virtues of abstinence and self-mortification. But it is still natural for great thoughts and actions, nay, for all intense passions and affections, and, in early life, even for common and casual attachments, to excite enthusiasm. The youth and girl of sixteen experience most commonly the enthusiasm of love; their imaginations are warm and vivid, their hopes extravagant, their fears swallowed up in their hopes. The swain, however homely in exterior, appears an Adonis to his enamoured mistress; while she on her part seems in his eyes to be more beautiful than Helen or Venus herself. There is at such times a slight haze over the imagination which tinges all objects, and makes the mind doat on it knows not

what. Visions of bliss hover upon the fancy, which seems to wander through delightful groves, where—

“ Empty dreams on every leaf are spread.”

Alas! these visions do not last! the tide of youthful spirits upon which they floated dries away for the most part in manhood, leaving a small rill shrinking with the march of years, until in old age scarcely a drop is left to trickle through the cold crannies of the mind! How few, but how glorious are the exceptions to this general truth! men having a degree of energy never to be exhausted, because directed very early into one single channel, in which it is gilded, but not absorbed, by the rays of fame and honour. When the mind has long made its election of a track, and caused all its powers to verge and slope towards that direction, it may appear, as to other things, a little too indolent and remiss, but all exact observers of human nature will allow that a man should appoint himself a task, and consider every stroke which does not tend towards its fulfilment as a piece of supererogatory labour. A man with great political designs will cultivate powerful friendships, multiply creatures, create dependents, but will keep the secret of his heart locked from all; his success hinging on obedience,



not on participation of knowledge. In small matters, closeness obstructs very often the accomplishment of a purpose; for a man's friends move in the dark respecting his wishes, and sometimes defeat them by trying to serve him. It is far better for a man to be able to communicate his own enthusiasm to his friends; and this is done by openness and sincerity, because upright and noble views have a natural charm for mankind, who will in all cases co-operate for the accomplishment of them, unless checked by some strong motive of self-interest. A man who has never been in the company of an enthusiast will hardly be able to conceive the glow of spirits, the bright conceptions, the new trains of associations, the bold magnificent hopes which overflow from his discourse, and communicate themselves by a kind of infection to all who hear him. People believe themselves to be new beings while they listen, and the spell continues associated ever after with his name, the sound of which recalls to their minds the pleasantest hours they ever, perhaps, passed in their lives. We have observed, however, that the old proverb, "like affects like," holds good in this as well as in most other instances; for only those possessing very exalted feelings, and who have the simplicity of heart to forgive their having been moved, retain a grateful

remembrance of the man who opened, if we may be allowed the metaphor, the floodgates of their souls, and set loose the whole stream of their emotions. Colder minds, raised to enthusiasm in such a moment, remember it with a sort of resentment, as if violence had been used to wrench off their covering of circumspection, and show how common prudence is melted by the warmth of passion. We once knew a man who could be wrought up to any pitch of feeling, and turned to any bent while strolling in the fields, or sitting on the cliffs by the seaside, on a summer's evening; but who cooled as he drew near the town, and had his mind at the freezing point in his own house. Without doubt this arose from a feebleness of mind which could not be moved, unless surrounded by things possessing some degree of novelty. His imagination was expanded by the presence of the phenomena of nature, but not being sufficiently vigorous to retain the impression, shrunk back on their being withdrawn to its original cold insignificance.

Some minds feel the presence of superior men irksome and disheartening. It puts them out of conceit with themselves. They are more full of hopes and designs among inferior persons, converse more at their ease, are merry, because there they feel their own consequence undiminished.

In the company of greater men they are in a state of eclipse: no one marks them; they would shine, but cannot; they therefore become uneasy, fidget, grow angry with themselves, and retire. Upon the same principle, dwarfs hate giants, and, in fact, all persons above their own size. It is observed by Quintilian, that it was a question in his time, whether youths should be put at first to study the most perfect models of composition, or such as were nearer their own capacities. He decided, of course, in favour of the best, because he thought it preposterous to copy imperfection while excellence was within reach. Another reason, which, perhaps, he did not think it judicious to mention, might have determined him: this course would tend to discourage the inferior and inadequate from the pursuit of eloquence, while it roused and animated the youth of real genius. By pursuing this train of thinking, we may discover the reason why the sons of great and eminent men have rarely equalled their fathers. In the first place, they perceive, as soon as they begin to perceive any thing, that they already stand, through their parent's honours, upon a certain 'vantage ground, from whence they may, without any exertion of their own, look down upon the greater part of mankind. This of itself takes away a great in-

centive to labour. But a more effectual cause remains: being impressed, from their earliest years, with the grandeur of their sires, a conviction of their own vast inferiority immediately arises, and this saps hope, and with it emulation, which being never felt without a mixture of envy, is incompatible with filial affection. These youths, thus overshadowed by the greatness of their fathers, like the young scions that dwindle at the foot of vast forest trees, contract an habitual conviction of inferiority, view the heights of fame as inaccessible or forbidden grounds, relax their energies, curb their expectations, and acquire the stamp of mediocrity. Few can conceive how much the perpetual presence of superior genius weighs down and oppresses; it is felt as a standing reproach and ever-recurring memento of comparative insignificance: but when that superior genius is a father, the mind becomes content to identify itself with and participate his greatness, and looks upon the emulation which would urge it to contend in the race of fame as a kind of parricidal envy. It is scarcely possible for a youth, determined to dispute the palm of superiority with his father, to escape this envy. Alexander felt it in so extravagant a degree, that he killed one of his friends, merely for dwelling

on his father's praises *unseasonably*, as his courtiers were of opinion. This reasoning does not apply to middling endowments of any kind, for men can participate mediocrity without much contention; but no one would willingly step from the pinnacle of glory to make room for another, were he even his son; and no son, while he revered his father, could conceive the desire of thrusting him from his station to place himself in his stead. Scaligers may beget Scaligers, and Le Fevres beget Daciers; but we nowhere read of the *younger* Homers, or Virgils, or Shakspeares, or Miltons, or Raphaels, or Michael Angelos. If they had children, they were hidden by excessive light, like stars in the neighbourhood of the sun, and were satisfied with the paternal glory. In truth, we learn that there was in the island of Chios a race of men who called themselves Homeridæ, or descendants of Homer, but they wrote no Iliads, very wisely contenting themselves with getting their bread by reciting that of their great ancestor. We catch a glimpse of Milton's daughters, also, in pouring oil, as it were, on their father's lamp, (for reading the ancients to him resembled some such process;) but we never learn that they tried their hands at a 'Paradise Lost' of their own.

The Greeks thought, we may be sure, that few fathers could bear to be overshadowed by their children's glory, for they represent Jupiter, the most wise as well as most powerful of the gods, repressing the vast desires he felt for Thetis, because it had been decreed by the Fates, (to which even he was subjected,) that the son she should bring forth would prove greater than his father. They could not have chosen a more complete way of showing, that the more exalted and ambitious kind of souls are aptest to feel the most vehement thirst of glory ; which was further illustrated by the preference given to love and enjoyment, over the fierce and doubtful transports of fame, by the modest and amiable Peleus. A fine moral lesson was also attached to this story : for Achilles, who knew that his own glory was built on the moderation of his parent, repaid his sire with the most perfect gratitude and filial love ; so it is likely that the old Argonautic hero, in his retirement in Phthiotis, experienced more exquisite delight from the odour of his son's renown, which fame wafted to his retreat, than he might perhaps have felt at the head of his conquering myrmidons before the walls of Troy. As for the son, he is represented as full of anxiety for the welfare of his parent, even in the regions of the dead, his

ghost conjuring Ulysses to inform him of his state:

“ Say if my sire, the reverend Peleus, reigns  
Great in his Phthia, and his throne maintains;  
Or, weak and old, my youthful arm demands,  
To fix the sceptre steadfast in his hands? ”

So full of truth and beauty is the old mythology!

Religious enthusiasm does not come within the scope of this disquisition: it is a distinct thing, and has been handled already by the most eminent writers. That other state of mind of which we have been speaking, is founded in different principles; is compatible with the most unbounded knowledge; is not repugnant to wisdom; has a close connexion with happiness; is inevitably consequent on mental energy and vigour. The spread of luxury and wealth and superficial acquirements saps its foundations insensibly: it requires a deep and clear mind. Of all the vices, none is so opposed to it as hypocrisy, for enthusiasm is independent and sincere. It is also delicate, and resents mean suspicions, and all presuming upon its condition. The oppression it is compelled to endure sometimes wears away its benevolence, contracts the stream of its affections, projects its yearnings forward upon futurity, and engenders schemes of self-aggrandizement, fami-



liarizing it, at the same time, with Machiavellian maxims and principles. An enthusiast, become misanthropical, is the most dangerous of men : he looks thenceforward on human nature as on an enemy's country, over which it is glorious to obtain triumph and exercise command ; and, living for himself alone, he sheathes himself in insensibility and the gloom of his opinions. Such are the peculiarities of Enthusiasm.



**THEORY**  
**OF**  
**CONSISTENCY OF CHARACTER.**



## CHAP. VIII.

### THEORY OF CONSISTENCY OF CHARACTER.

What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what I should be? — MILTON.

CONSISTENCY is a quality which almost all persons are anxious to attribute to themselves. For to foresee from the beginning what course ought to be taken, to imagine a uniform scheme of life, to pursue vigorously and unswervingly the development of well-chosen principles, is an argument of the highest wisdom and grandeur of soul. It is, therefore, by a wise instinct, if instinct admit an adjective, that men affect consistency in whatever they do or think. They know by experience for how much it always passes current in the world; and the same school teaches them that it is a quality of ambiguous feature, whose image and superscription other and inferior qualities may be made to bear.

In regard to the virtue itself,—the reason why it is admired is obvious enough: whatever is regular and uniform ceases as soon as it is known to be the object of experiment, and is classed by the mind among those things about which no doubts need be entertained. It is our natural love of ease which induces us, therefore, to form, once for all, an estimate of the character of those with whom we live and converse, and, having done so, to repose on the notion resulting from our limited experience as on something stable and permanent. For in fact our indolence disinclines us to be every moment making new moral experiments on our associates; and is the cause why we are ready to consider our first rough draught of their character as a perfect picture, and to condemn any bias we may afterwards discover in it as a blemish superinduced upon the original frame of their mind, while, perhaps, it always constituted one of their chief characteristics, though shaded from our observation at first by the projecting angle of some other peculiarity. Indeed, half the inconsistency and vacillation in the world is entirely imaginary, and arises from the rapidity with which we sketch to ourselves the characters of men. Perfect consistency, however, the most rare of all human qualities, can be said to form a portion of the character only when

from the existence of one virtue all others of the same genus may be inferred: as, from generosity, disinterestedness; from disinterestedness, justice; from justice, magnanimity, &c. And, perhaps, it is impossible to be really consistent in virtue or in vice; for cruelty itself, and tyranny, have their weak moments, and are touched by the unwonted working of compassion. Even Nero, when the sentence passed upon a criminal was brought to him in form to be signed, cried out, "Would to God I had never been taught to write!" Of so much value did human life appear to him at that moment.

The character of some persons, gentle and amiable in small matters and domestic intercourse, but reckless and mischievous in politics, is a moral problem that has been thought of difficult solution. But the adder does not sting its brood, nor the eagle prey in its own nest. Besides, a man may be actuated by very homicidal propensities, but be denied by nature the sternness and cool courage necessary to exert them personally. Face to face, and by his own fire-side, a tyrant may be a very agreeable person; chiefly, because he, perhaps, perceives that physically all around him are his equals or superiors, and that it might be dangerous to rouse their anger or revenge. Possessing, however, the power of killing at a

distance, of conducting massacre invisibly, of animating by a word or a stroke of the pen the daggers or bayonets of thousands with an appetite for murder, his fears operate on him no longer ; and the man whose sensibility might be tortured at the sight of a mouse agonizing in a trap, will in his closet and comfortable arm-chair, ravage provinces with his pen, and spill the blood of widows and orphans without compunction.

It is an old theme, the inconsistency of human virtues ! But observe how unequally and absurdly even courage, the most robust habit of the mind, develops itself : the soldier, whose business it is to be familiar with danger, and to think lightly of death, and who would mount a breach without shrinking, will sometimes shudder to pass the night alone in the aisle of a church, or to stumble over a coffin in the dark on some wild heath ; while a crazy old sexton, with one foot in the grave, whom the noise of a demi-culverin would terrify to death, will ply his pick-axe in a burying-ground, and toss about skulls and crural bones by moonlight, with all the cheerfulness in the world. The courage of this sexton is very different from the courage of the soldier, and far more difficult to be acquired. In battle, the whole scene is energy, and, though the business be death, there is life, action, and stirring sound on all sides.

Like a taper that kindles into greater brightness just before it goes out, life appears to muster up in war its most shining efforts, and to burst, like a bubble, when its powers are largest. But in the sexton's field, a silent, cold, gnawing consciousness of mortality attacks the heart, backed by trooping fears and apprehensions of what may be beyond the winding-sheet. Worms, grown fat and wanton on the brain or cheek of some village beauty, tumble out of the black mould as he lifts his spade, and pale ghosts seem to shriek and jibber as his mattock strikes into their earthly hiding-place. His fancy becomes soiled with images of corruption, and the satellites of the King of Terrors creep into and inhabit his very dreams. Yet habit reconciles him to his calling, and at length he digs a grave for his neighbour with as much indifference as a farmer turns up a furrow in a turnip field. Now this sexton, so bold and so callous among ghosts and worms, might prove, as we have already observed, an arrant coward in the field of battle; and in the midnight grave the soldier would acquit himself equally ill. Nevertheless, both cultivate a branch of courage, though not the whole virtue; and the greater part of mankind are no better in this respect than they. For you may every day meet with persons in the world professing liberal and enlarged notions, and af-



fecting great superiority over the vulgar, who are as vulnerable to the tricks of rhetoric as the shallowest of the multitude, being led by a melodious period, by a brilliant metaphor, by a pathos purely artificial, to approve for the time of the most irrational schemes and projects. In fact, the animal with whom Yorick was wont so frequently to colloquize, and to whom he gave the *maccaroné* at—we forget where,—was never more readily led by the ear than man. Words have ever been his idols: to these, artfully arranged, he gives the name of wisdom; to them he bows down in worship; by them he is irritated, enraged, maddened, soothed, wrought to compassion, rendered merciful, persuaded to virtue. The master of words is his master. Where, then, is the real courage of beings thus subdued and enslaved by words? The principal merit of the institutions of Lycurgus, abused much oftener than understood, was, that they emancipated the citizens of Lacedæmon from the tyranny of noisy rhetoric. The Spartan was taught to look upon eloquence as a veil, wrought over with beautiful figures, and cast indifferently before beauty or deformity; while it was waved or unfolded before him, he stood tranquil, endeavouring to look at what might be behind it, and decided according to the glimpses he thus caught.

It is words that, under the name of slander



and calumny, strike terror into the bravest. Nothing but words. For, although philosophers have endeavoured to show that we are fearful of calumny only as it is an indication of evil intentions towards us, which, by spreading, may bring actual damage to our fortunes ; experience denies the inference, and demonstrates that in such instances words alone are the objects of our apprehension. Let the calumniated individual be on his death-bed, let him be the last of his race, and expect to leave behind him no beloved head upon which the sting of slander could inflict a wound ; let the grave, in such case friendly and beneficent, offer him for ever the amplest indemnity from suffering and malice and danger and loss—still the prospect of being pursued after death with false and hateful words (himself now become a word !) shall terrify and torment him, and double the bitterness of dissolution !

The very foundation of our hopes and fears would, if carefully examined, be found to rest chiefly on our misapprehension of words. The concurrence of the will of numbers constitutes power ; power moving long in one direction, as it were, becomes right ; and the exertion of this right being intrusted to some one individual, appears at length to be his natural office. This notion establishes tyranny, which subsists, there-

fore, on the folly of imagining an immutable relation between the act and the instrument; between government and the governor. Society itself is built upon the fiction, that priority of possession constitutes right; and the condition of men subsisting in it can never be considerably bettered until the greater number shall perceive correctly the comparative value of peace and liberty.

But the errors and inconsistencies which are common to nearly all mankind, are perhaps incorrigible, and therefore profitless subjects of speculation; those affecting only certain individuals, or, at most, certain classes of men, afford more useful scope for reflection.

Numerous as are the occasions on which men differ from themselves, and go floating on between doubt and decision, it is yet a common failing to inculcate them oftener than they are guilty. The vulgar mistake change of means for inconsistency; and, on the contrary, see no mutability in a character that tends, with the same appearances, to various and incompatible ends. A man setting up, in the beginning, Fame as the goal of his exertions, may set out with amassing wealth, and make avarice his first instrument; the first step made, he may have occasion to distribute his riches to bribe praise and silence envy; then, if it lie within his sphere, he may acquire power, and,

to remove pernicious men, may exercise it harshly or even cruelly; having proceeded thus far, and silenced opposition, he may sacrifice the possession of despotic power to freedom, and, stepping from a throne, mingle with the crowd from whence he rose. To many this would appear a mere series of inconsistency, for want of discerning the real aim of the whole. Such, however, very nearly, was the career of Sylla the Fortunate, a proud and lofty intellect, than which few more great and none more consistent ever existed. On the other hand, some men, whose views, like Jonah's gourd, spring up and perish in a night, establish their reputation for consistency by always practising the same habits, and maintaining the same observances. If prudence be their favourite habit, then they are always, or nearly always, exceedingly cautious and circumspect. If courage, they brave all dangers alike, as far, at least, as their courage will hold. They are the slaves of some particular virtue.

However, as we begin to live before we have gained the least experience, or formed any very correct notion of what we would aim at, perhaps it is, after all, a fortunate circumstance that the beginning is not set up as the rule of our lives. For, in advancing into futurity, we take up, for the most part, our positions in the dark, like an

army moving by stealth, and scarcely know whether we are in the neighbourhood of good or ill, before the light of experience has begun to dawn about us. When we happen to make a wrong movement, we should, if we piqued ourselves on our consistency, be very loth to retreat, like poor Doctor Sangrado in 'Gil Blas,' who, though he found his method of bleeding and administering warm water in all diseases to be more destructive than the plague, was prevented from altering his system by the consideration that he had written a book in defence of it. Indeed, we daily meet with Sangrados who have never meddled with physic, or written a book, but who have formerly said something which they are now ashamed to retract. To preserve the appearance of consistency, they make oracles of the sentiments of past moments, and are always wrong, because they had the ill luck to be so twenty years ago. Some persons, too, we find industriously endeavouring to provide the means of preserving themselves in error *in secula seculorum*, by oaths and vows. This attempt to put out the eye of the future, originates, we suspect, in unsteadiness of character and self-distrust. For a man would hardly think of making heaven a surety for his good behaviour, unless from some inward consciousness of a leaning towards the transgression dreaded.

Be this as it may, the persons most addicted to vows and irrevocable determinations are women, and men resembling them strongly in softness of disposition and in waywardness of mind. Exceeding indecision and doubt are very painful to support, and their continued pressure is a thing the mind would gladly be rid of at almost any price. It is thus that very weak persons muster sufficient courage to become monks, nuns, dervishes, or fakirs, that they may set the seal of religious terror on their brittle resolves, and link their actions to a fatal uniformity.

If the actions of mankind be at all influenced by their opinions, it is by no means wonderful that men behave inconsistently; for opinion is always changing. We commonly enter upon manhood with a very large stock of notions, picked up casually and indiscriminately, and these we are compelled as we go along to abandon one by one, till all, perhaps, upon which we valued our judgment originally, has been driven out of our minds. There is no law of the Medes and Persians for opinion. It undergoes more metamorphoses than the butterfly. It is a star shining in the dawn of knowledge, but lost in the increasing light; or, perhaps, it may be best compared to the twilight, which separates light from darkness, in which we both perceive and

judge imperfectly. Opinion, therefore, being a kind of half-knowledge, is liable to be perpetually removed as knowledge advances, and at length to be entertained of those things only which the intellect cannot approach sufficiently near. In a thing of so mutable a kind, consistency is not to be hoped for. We may very well entertain opinions now, which, in fact, would appear incompatible with each other were our knowledge enlarged; nay, with our present degree of knowledge, were we to apply it to the careful sifting of our notions. But even those who examine their conceptions most narrowly, and affect a sceptical indifference to both sides of an argument, entertain ideas in their mind which appear repugnant to each other. Montaigne is an example. He is a writer by no means over credulous, or disposed to be complaisant to the prejudices of mankind: what he thinks and feels he translates into honest downright expressions, and transfers to his essays for the good of the reader. If, therefore, any author whatever might be expected to be consistent, it should be the man whose standard of truth and falsehood is in his own breast; who never looks to authority to learn what he is to believe and what not; but, pursuing the current of his own cogitations, admits conclusions or rejects them simply as they appear true or false.

But opinion, in the mind of Montaigne, is a real vapour, assuming a new shape every moment, and new colours; and shifting, as it were, before the wind, now gilds and now darkens the imagination. The honest old gentleman knew very well that where certainty is not to be reached, apparent extravagance is soon reconciled to the mind, and that therefore opinions are not at all the less captivating for being a little absurd. He saw with what boyish enthusiasm we cherish our own fancies, and make them part of our creed, and how readily we anathematize all heretical disputants, and impugnors of our infallibility. From this, and other similar views of human nature, he fell at times into an opinion very disadvantageous to the dignity of our species, and gave vent to his contemptuous notions with impetuous vehemence. On other occasions, the perusal of Plato, or Plutarch, leading him insensibly into the contemplation of sublime ideas or sublimer actions, effaced from his memory all mean associations with humanity; and, in the fire of his enthusiasm, he broke out into the warmest, most animated, eloquent, and exalted panegyric on human nature, in the person of Socrates, that ever perhaps flowed from the lips or pen of any man. Rousseau, who, in many other respects, very much resembled Montaigne, entertained also,

like him, a motley opinion of mankind. And Mr. Hazlitt, who has something of the spirit of Montaigne and Rousseau, and speaks perhaps with equal ingenuousness the sentiments he cherishes, preserves this characteristic of his favourite authors,—that he is every whit as inconsistent in his opinions as they.

Perhaps, however, there are very few of us in any better predicament. Change of position induces change of views, and reconciles our minds to sentiments we may previously have regarded with horror. It does not fall to the lot of many to be acquainted long before hand with the circumstances and persons that are to influence their fate, and, consequently, to affect, in some measure, their opinions of mankind. The sort of consistency, therefore, which is practicable, or indeed desirable, is, to act according to present views, and to take full advantage of all previous experience. This, in reality, is to be still the same, and what we should be.



**DELIGHTS**  
**OF**  
**INTELLECTUAL SUPREMACY.**

**VOL. I.**

**K**

THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BOSTON  
FROM THE FIRST SETTLEMENT  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
BY NATHANIEL BENTLEY  
OF THE BARR

DESCRIPTIVE

OF THE CITY OF BOSTON  
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## CHAP. IX.

### DELIGHTS OF INTELLECTUAL SUPREMACY.

WHOEVER reads many books must find among them some for which he will entertain strong predilections. But wherefore? Do these favourite books contain more germs of agreeable associations than any others? Are they such as minister to the growth and vigour of the intellect, by challenging contentious application, or such as open their treasures readily to the reader, and gratify, like music, the present moment, without carrying forward a thought to futurity?

Books, numerous as they are, may be properly divided into two classes: those which require in the reader knowledge and the habit of thinking; and those which do not. But in each genus there are so many species, distinguished by their proper peculiarities, and consisting each of so many individuals differing among themselves, that, in

making this division, we are sensible we leave the reader a wide field and great scope for his own judgment and conjecture. It is with books, however, as with men, the pleasantest are not always the most valuable. But as literature is to be valued exactly in proportion as it contributes to happiness, the books best calculated to bestow pleasure, which forms so important an ingredient of happiness, appear, at first sight, to deserve the preference before all others; and whether they do or not, they obtain it. The world judges, however, much more correctly than it acts. Put the matter before it in this light: we will imagine a prince, desirous of choosing from among his courtiers the one most competent to infuse into his son those principles and opinions and virtues, which, when the authority both of father and teacher shall have ceased, may best enable the youth to act with justice and dignity. Does he search for a man pleasing and insinuating, intent upon diffusing, wherever he goes, enjoyment and vivacity; but still more intent upon making himself the fountain of this delight, that his society may be courted, and rendered, in fact, necessary to the happiness of his companions? Or for one who, having himself learned to derive from his own breast the greater part of his pleasures, is capable of generating in others a

similar power, together with enlarged notions of duty and those social relations upon which it is founded?

Books are mischievous when they beget the idea that happiness is to be derived from books; no matter whether this idea be clearly and distinctly recognized by the mind, or only a vague persuasion operating imperceptibly on the conduct. It is an undoubted fact, that the greater number of books have a tendency to weaken and perplex the mind, and to diminish exceedingly the sources of human felicity. No doubt this doctrine may be assailed, for there is no proposition mailed so closely in the armour of truth as to dishearten all attempts at wounding it. But what can be so destructive of all nice powers of perception as that perpetual transition from one new trifle to another, in which the lives of what are called the "reading public," are consumed! What so certainly productive of that mental effeminacy which craves after excitement with a fierceness resembling the hunger of a besieged garrison! Who can be happy that depends upon the contents of 'Blackwood' or the 'Edinburgh Review,' for topics to think or speak upon for a month or a quarter of a-year to come? Thousands now watch as eagerly for the appearance of a new novel, as

the Mohammedans, towards the end of the Ramadan, do for the new moon, or the Jews on a fast day for the first star. Is this the genuine thirst of well-regulated minds for knowledge, or an unnatural appetite for novelty, created and maintained by the peculiar circumstances of the times? We talk of the passion of the Athenians of Phocion's days for theatrical representations; but our own passion for frivolous reading, to say nothing now of our other amusements, is not less absurd. Book-making, reading, and gambling, occupy half the nation.

It is not among these indiscriminate devourers of novelty that we are to look for the admirers of favourite authors. They have no time for favouritism. Like death, they swallow whatever accident or misfortune brings within their capacious grasp, and are always ready for more. It is not their province to linger fondly on some beautiful passage, or some bright idea, as the mind always lingers about what it loves; or to turn back with affectionate reverence to the first mute teachers of their youth, to try whether the same noble sentiments would still find the same warm responses in their heart? No. The author of to-day is always superior in their judgment to the author of yesterday; and as to such as lived and wrote

in former times, the superior lights of modern civilization render it perfectly unnecessary to consume gas or candle-light in discovering how little they had the good luck to understand in those barbarous ages.

To make an idol, however, of some one writer, as many do of Shakspeare, and have done of Homer, is a no less certain mark of weakness of understanding. It is from the same mean spirit which in politics leads them to worship a monarch, and bless the destiny which gave them a haughty hereditary superior. No writer deserves this exclusive preference. There is no Jupiter in the republic of letters. Vulgar understandings, however, always require some jealous object of adoration, which they may suppose perfect, being impatient of that long and sceptical survey of men or books, which hesitates to confer the crown of excellence, and dies doubting. The absence of fanatical preference by no means supposes a capacious disposition to censure; for the man who does not, like Don Quixote, imagine his mistress entirely a Venus, may, notwithstanding, be a very ardent lover. Indeed, the representatives which some men have left us of their souls are so essentially beautiful, that, although some slight traces of the earthly mould still clings upon the image,



the general lineaments and expression extort our warmest applause. But, we confess, that they who can single out from the immortal group some one figure, and pronounce it the most beautiful, must possess more taste or more presumption than we pretend to. Perhaps, however, so much may not be implied by choosing a favourite author; it may, after all, consist in yielding to an involuntary preference, arising from some secret affinity between the admired and the admirer. Oftener still it may take its rise in affectation, and become real from time and custom.

But in what way soever it arises, a moderate preference for some one great author, indulged with judgment and continued for a course of years, or for life, is one of the surest roads to excellence and the renown it bestows. There is no danger that a strong mind will lose its originality by such an intimacy, and sink into slavish imitation; or the same argument would hold against forming a close personal friendship with any great contemporary. For, whatever may be said, the habit of constant intimacy with a living friend is much more likely to affect our notions and our style than any familiarity we should be likely to form with a deceased author's remains. And, after all, for what purpose do we read, if



it be not, that by studying the ways in which others have expressed their thoughts, we may learn, when we also have thoughts worth expressing, to convey them to others in the best manner possible? None are in danger of being injured by imitation, who are worthy that we should entertain a fear for them. Great painters imitate each other without scruple. The world expects that they shall imitate, and therefore our young artists are packed off in shoals to study the frescoes and statues of Rome. To be sure, there are critics who anticipate, that from the contemplation of the antique nothing beautiful or original can possibly spring; though whatever Michael Angelo or modern sculpture has done, would never have had any existence but for the beautiful wrecks and fragments of antiquity scattered over Italy. These created their taste and awoke their emulation, and art has long despaired of producing any thing more exquisite.

Ordinary authors imagine, that when they admire a writer, they should show it every moment by appealing to his authority, or speaking in his words. Hence their thoughts are but echoes of his, and their style a string of quotations adorned with inverted commas. Now, Aristotle, however paradoxical it may seem, was Bacon's

favourite, though Bacon never said so: and it is to his secret struggles to rival that great master of reason that we owe the *Novum Organum*, and those other splendid fragments of the *Magna Instauration*, which will survive the Coliseum and the Pyramids. Had Bacon made a pet of his genius, and kept it sedulously aloof from the influence of that great mind, buried, but not slumbering, in his ponderous Greek tomes, the world might still have been deformed by more of the cobwebs of the middle ages than are now seen hanging upon our institutions.

It is a very usual thing with those who affect singularity, to be more than ever singular in the choice of their favourite authors. These never fail to be some of those illustrious obscure, whom the world with one consent decrees to condemn to eternal oblivion; and will, notwithstanding their silly admirers. Coleridge, in his '*Biographia Literaria*,' that most singular tissue of mysticism and affectation, pretends to trace Hume's philosophical notions to a long-forgotten tract of Thomas of Aquinas, because, it seems, he or Payne Knight discovered a copy of the tract in question with Hume's MS. notes upon it. Coleridge, with the rest of that school, would have been too happy could he have traced our philosopher's footsteps

among the subtleties of the Angelical Doctor, to have withheld the proofs of the fact from the public. It would indeed have been singular to find the favourite author of a sceptic, not among the great writers of his own creed,—“if creed it may be termed, which creed is none,”—but among trifling theological disputants, fighting habitually with opponents less noble than a wind-mill. Hazlitt observes acutely, that Coleridge himself always contrives to prefer *the unknown to the known*. This is the trick of all persons of his stamp. They would be thought to judge more finely than the whole world, and could create this impression simply by making it clear that they had discovered wit where ordinary mortals find nothing but dullness, and light where they only find obscurity. Coleridge should have lived in the middle ages. He would have made a figure among the Irrefragable Doctors, who illustrated the balance of equal motives, by supposing an ass, equally hungry and thirsty, placed between a pail of water and a bundle of hay, and starving for want of decision.

There is nothing extraordinary in liking an author whom every body likes. It seems a vulgar predilection, unworthy of a wit. But it may perhaps be worth while to consider for a moment

whether we would wish to resemble him, whose beauties are visible to every eye, or one of those hieroglyphical sages, whose profounder meaning must be dived for by a Young or a Champollion. For our part, we are utterly common-place in our favouritism, admiring precisely those authors who, with very few exceptions, stand, and have always stood, highest with the public. There is, indeed, as much difference between a great author and a writer of philosophical puzzles, as between a soothsayer and an historian: vagueness, cloudy eloquence, the lightning of metaphor, marshal themselves in the prognostication, before the sense, and dazzle while they delude the eye which attempts to penetrate through them into futurity; in the great narrator of facts we discover, not merely the acts of this or that nation, but the actions which mankind are constantly performing. Futurity will still reflect the past like a mirror. In the past, therefore, where the deeds and misdeeds of mankind stand arrayed in sunshine, we may behold the future; and for this reason, historians are always enumerated among the favourite authors of all thinking men.

This idea leads naturally to the reflection, how glorious a thing it is to become one of the favourite authors of mankind. All men, who make the study

and exposition of their own thoughts their profession, must, we apprehend, experience immense difficulty in discovering a proper nucleus around which to arrange the ideas they most value. Yet, without such a nucleus, or *point d'appui*, if this expression be better, there is scarcely, perhaps, any effort of genius sufficient to elaborate an immortal production, a production which, amid the vicissitudes of time, the revolutions of learning, the variations of taste, the changes of opinions and religions, shall still find in every country and in every age, admirers, imitators, guarantees for the continuance of its fame. It is certainly something very noble to make one's voice heard through all the din of a thousand years; to be the creator of expressions, with which, when we shall have long been mingled with the elements, unborn generations shall be thrilled with pleasure, or made wiser, or better, or more content with their lot; to transmute our fleeting thoughts into imperishable signs, which may be made as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore, and as lasting as the world; and, by means of these, to make ourselves the companions of man's fortune for ever, and hold sway over his resolutions, and temper his passions, and influence his happiness, like a household god, ever ready to be consulted on his

domestic hearth, and ever advising that, which, followed, must render him our grateful debtor! To become one of these oracles, to change ourselves from frail, changeful, transitory beings, subject, like the most ignorant, to sorrow and sickness, into impassive, unchangeable, eternal somethings, is surely reward sufficient for a few years of abstinence and watching, and toil, and endurance, and study.

**EMPIRE**  
**OF THE**  
**DEAD OVER THE LIVING.**







## CHAP. X.

### EMPIRE OF THE DEAD OVER THE LIVING.

*De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

OUR present subject, the respect due to the memory of the dead, has a deep-rooted, general interest,—an interest in which every man more or less sensibly shares, and which, if well considered, will be allowed to have given rise very naturally to the maxim we have chosen for our motto. Whenever, in general society, the dead are made the topic of conversation, a disposition to censure lightly their faults and errors, and to enhance their merits and agreeable qualities, is observable in most men; and, indeed, the contrary would, for the most part, be regarded as exceedingly savage and unamiable. A disposition so generally prevalent must have some grounds in our common nature; what these are, it is our present business to inquire.

Man is naturally magnanimous, and, in general, drops all hatred, and even envy, the most persevering of all passions, as soon as their object is prostrated and rendered powerless by misfortune or by death; his feelings regarding the grave lead him, in most cases, to consider it as an asylum to which humanity may retire unmolested from the struggles, and trials, and sufferings, and bitter remembrances of life. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!" Perhaps our rival or our enemy, had he fallen into our power, would not have appeared to deserve any punishment approaching in severity the loss of life; perhaps he might have been forgiven; and, therefore, when death has stepped into the arena, and laid our adversary at our feet, we should experience, in siding with this king of terrors, a feeling of injustice and pusillanimity, and appear to be bearding the dead lion. It happens, too, very frequently, that we contend with only a portion of a man's character, with his love of power, with his petulance, with his pride, overlooking, for the time, his generosity and other amiable qualities; but when the contest is closed by death, when our fears and our jealousies are for ever extinguished, and the medium thus removed through which only the man appeared detestable, we begin to wonder at and repent of our former opposition, and to say within

ourselves: "He was, after all, a much better man than we thought him."

The petty insults and injuries that disturb the tranquillity of private life, intrusted to so frail a chronicle as the memory, soon sink into oblivion, unless where, as in Arabia, the *lex talionis* perpetuates their remembrance. Yet to such as carry their reflections but a very short way into futurity, the fame or infamy that survives them in their little circle appears of some consequence; to their surviving friends it is of as much as if it were to be engraven on the forehead of renown to make the circle of eternity. The paltry vices, for example, and mean tyranny of a country magistrate, however vexatious to his contemporaries, can be of no moment to posterity; they will, therefore, assuredly be forgotten in much less than a century; but the reflection that the happiness of his children and friends must be deeply affected by the good or bad name he may leave behind, will have influence, as often as such a reflection is made, upon the magistrate's conduct; and would have more, if he saw ignominy more constantly following in the track of crime. But, in general, men have very little temptation to brand with infamy the memory of the dead; it is so much labour, they think, in vain; and when the first bursts of resentment or indignation have ex-

hausted themselves to no purpose, it would appear to them as rational to make war with the elements, as to continue to triumph over an inmate of the grave.

By forbearing to do what they very well know to be useless, politic men likewise expect to obtain the reputation of generosity and greatness of mind; they do not exult, not they, over a prostrate foe; they respect the sanctity of the tomb; their enemy is gone to answer before the last tribunal for his actions; religion forbids them to urge their hatred beyond the precincts of hell or heaven. This has weight with mankind. The true secret, however, of their moderation is, that they fear no further opposition from the dead. There is another reason which makes men tender of the privileges of death: they are conscious of failings in themselves, and know that they must die; it may, they think, be their own turn next, to undergo the sifting of envy, or to encounter the searching eye of justice; their consciences whisper what must be the result; they tremble for their good name, and endeavour to soften the rigour of posterity by affecting forbearance for their predecessors.

By the softness of their nature, many, in reality, are backward to utter censure, however well merited; they view even the vices of mankind

with pity; and mercy appears to them the most divine of all attributes. We are all, perhaps, interested in impressing upon each other the value of a merciful disposition, as it is the lot of all occasionally to need forgiveness; but that unwillingness to wound the feelings of mischievous individuals, or of their family after their death, is at all favourable to the general good, may very justly be questioned. Fear is a much more powerful principle than gratitude, and operates more promptly and universally; and, therefore, sternness and rigour are more natural allies to virtue than extreme mildness and mercy. Poets may be allowed to enhance, by the splendour of metaphors and similes, the loveliness of mercy, and to tell us that

It droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven !

but reason would seldom disenthroned justice to put mercy in its place. It is at best but a kind of handmaid to justice, and may sometimes be permitted to intercede for the criminal. Of all the virtues, justice, perhaps, is the least popular; it is, in its nature, awful, and sublime, and unbending, and self-sufficient; it is incessantly surrounded by toil, and watchfulness, and self-denial; but, in the midst of these terrible satellites, it maintains a perpetual serenity. In these circum-

stances of justice we discover the reason why truly great men are seldom objects of love to the multitude, who are awed by the severity of virtue, but reserve their affection for easy, complying dispositions. In illustration of this truth, we have frequently observed in conversation the effect produced upon ordinary minds by Sallust's contrasted pictures of Cato and Cæsar: the "*malis pernicies*," the "*nihil largiendo*," the "*malebat esse, quam videri, bonus*," of the former, all characteristics of justice, have received but a cold approbation tinged with dislike; while the "*clarus factus mansuetudine, et miserecordia*," the "*dando, sublevando, ignoscendo*," of Cæsar, have diffused a glow of satisfaction through the heart. This we have considered a silent confession that they would have stood better with the urbane forgiving tyrant, than with the honest but stern republican, who, in being the "*malis pernicies*," was the object of their aversion.

Owing to a false tenderness for the dead, or, more generally, perhaps, a real tenderness for the living, we seldom find the genuine characters of men depicted in their epitaphs, which are generally nothing more than

Sepulchral lies our holy walls to grace.

Under proper regulations, however, a tomb-

stone might be made a kind of Rhadamanthus, and give sentence upon the ashes deposited beneath with inexorable justice. Were this the case, we might read the history of a country's morals in its burying-grounds, or on the walls of its churches; and might learn to calculate the degrees of influence which the country and the city exert upon men's virtue. But, at present, what woful havoc would not truth make with the vocabulary of tomb-stone-cutters! For our part, we have sometimes been unable to repress a sad smile, when, taking shelter from sun or shower under the lugubrious yews of some country church-yard, we have perused at leisure the encomiums of those faithless historians, the tombs! According to their accounts, we were treading on the ashes of saints and sages, who, with Berkeley, had possessed "every virtue under heaven." In one instance, some of our own intimates were there, but so bedecked by the rural sculptor with virtues and fine qualities, from the same principle that humble affection strews flowers over the grave, that we with difficulty recognised them. Not that they had by any means been bad men; far from it; but while they were harmless, they were insignificant, never having given themselves the trouble to exert the energies of virtue.

Many persons conceive they are greatly



benefiting the cause of public virtue by endeavouring to eternize the memory of a late honest politician, whose life it seems was every way irreproachable. But, although he could have been no ordinary man, who was able to behave with firmness and without reproach in public and private life, not having united genius with innocence, he was no subject for fame. Men have no permanent sympathy for any thing but intellectual power, and experience a feeling of burlesque as often as they attempt to attach eminent importance to qualities merely amiable; such attributes never being the ground of great reputation, or impressing upon mankind that sense of awe and admiration which is ever the effect of intellectual greatness. Socrates is not considered the pattern of humanity for his patient bearing towards Xantippe, for his goodness as a father, as a friend, as a citizen; in these respects, many, perhaps, whom fame never heard of, have equalled him; he is looked upon as the first of men, because, to an incomparable genius, he united the energy of active virtue, with passion and dignity, and indifference for riches, and poverty, and death. His character was divine, because his virtues were the offspring, not of natural instincts or tendencies, but of genius and study; of that genius which generated the minds of Plato, of Xenophon, of



Aristotle ; that is, carried human nature as far as intellect can carry it. One may easily perceive by this the folly of attempting to excite an artificial enthusiasm for an inferior individual, whether before or after death ; his portion is and should be oblivion.

Every prejudice in society may be traced more or less immediately to government, and among others the irrational respect thought to be due to the dead. Princes, not in general very distinguished for virtue, feel from the eminence of their station a peculiar repugnance to scrutiny, and consider attacks upon a predecessor as nothing less than the first approaches of envy, as they term it, towards their own persons. But if the sovereign protects his own immediate ancestors from deserved censure, he can, with no face of justice, refuse the same privilege to his courtiers ; to render his protection effectual he must procure the sanction of the laws : thus the principle is acknowledged, and it henceforth becomes criminal to speak the truth of any respectable villain. This is the true source of that trembling anxiety with which the memory of the dead is watched in monarchical governments, being a consequence of that principle which makes truth a libel. As it is only an ingenious expedient to screen the vices of the prince, it should have no existence in a free

country, in which virtue ought ever to be valued above peace ; and as virtue is generated by praise and emulation, it must necessarily languish where it is confounded by the laws with vice and immorality, by being enclosed within the same pale of protection. It is said, and of course very truly, that although the laws in monarchical governments forbid men to express their real sentiments of each other, they have no power to force them into wrong conceptions of character, and that thus virtue *is* actually respected and vice detested *in spite of the laws*. This is saying nothing more than that the laws have no power over our *thoughts* ; but it is because we dare not speak what we *do* think that these laws are vicious and tyrannical. High personages, as we have seen, such as kings and ministers, have their vices protected by the laws even after death ; to expose their faults, to show what they were, to say to mankind, “ these were the gods ye worshipped ! ” is libellous, either because it is said to bring the government into contempt, or to tend to disturb the “ king’s peace.” History itself lowers its voice and treads softly, as it draws near present times, lest it should provoke the notice of the Attorney-General, be fined, and sent to the King’s Bench prison to reflect upon the matter.

All this is a strong indication that the love of

fame and the dread of infamy act very powerfully on the minds of princes, though the love of pleasure and dominion is found, in the greater number, to be still more powerful. They are flattered too by the hope of eluding obloquy by cunning devices, such as keeping in pay poets laureate, historiographers, news-writers, &c., who, with the nicest sophistry, gild over their crimes, and convert their frailties and follies into subjects of praise and congratulation. One monarch makes petticoats with peculiar neatness for the Virgin Mary; another is a connoisseur in coat-making; a third fishes with great felicity; a fourth understands to perfection the composition of soups and ragouts. This is matter of praise during the lifetime of the illustrious cooks and fishermen: as, while Nero and Domitian lived, it was matter of praise that the former was an amateur actor and poet, and the latter an expert fly-catcher; but the most loyal writer living does not now go out of his way to sing the praises of those old legitimates for the above-mentioned princely accomplishments, though, in a reigning monarch, they would strain hard to find something laudable in such practices. However, as we said, the mere fact of princes maintaining a *menagerie* of poets, newsmongers, and historians, to display their magnificence, is a proof that they are unwilling to

be branded with infamy after death, to leave behind them a name odious to the ears of men, and inserted in the Index Expurgatorius of renown. From this hint mankind might draw a useful lesson. The kings of past ages are free game: their vices are not sacred; William the Norman, or Louis XI., or Richard III., may be held up to execration with impunity. Let men carry their reflections into futurity, and imagine they hear the judgments of their remote descendants; it will considerably dispel the mist through which they always look at present objects.

Coarse matter-of-fact reasoners contend, we are aware, that nothing short of the dread of personal punishment can deter the powerful from crime. But princes, they perceive, are most anxious to transmit the power they possess to their offspring, and are also persuaded that all power is engrafted on opinion; their reason, therefore, must inform them, that the fortunes of their race will very much depend upon their present conduct, and the reputation they shall leave behind them; and although their unchastened passions, and the insolence of sovereignty, often lead them into the most shameless excesses, it is clear, from their solicitude to ward off its point, that they consider fame to be the weapon which God has put into the hands of mankind

to avenge themselves upon their tyrants. A prince, succeeding to a wicked father, must read in the ambiguous countenances of all around him, in spite of the *jussus vultus* for which courtiers are celebrated, that he is viewed, like the dawn which follows a tempestuous night, with doubt and awe; and if ever he visits the tombs of his forefathers, must shudder to think that the dust before him, the parental dust, though cased in marble, and covered by trophies and monuments of glory, is execrated by his people, who long in their hearts to trample it in the dunghill, as the most hateful offal of humanity. When the Romans dragged the mangled carcass of Nero through the streets, the reigning Emperor might have read the fate, under similar circumstances, of his own remains; and it is the fellow-feeling, produced by a reflection of this kind, that has induced so many sovereigns to be respectful to the corse of their deceased enemies. It is certain, therefore, that princes are bitterly stung by the odium cast upon the memory of departed tyrants; their hearts sicken at the bare mention of Caligula and Helio-gabalus. How much more if such men had been their own ancestors, their immediate predecessors, their fathers! Let our matter-of-fact reasoners imagine in their own hands a sceptre haunted by the associations which would unavoidably arise

in such a case, and they will hardly doubt so pertinaciously the influence of fame.

The desire, indeed, of posthumous reputation is natural to all men, and is a powerful auxiliary to virtue; but to an acute observer the value of this reputation must appear considerably diminished, when it is seen with how little regard to truth and justice fame is sometimes bestowed. For if the mind be warmed by the reflection that, in spite of time and death, it shall leave the remembrance of its excellence impressed upon the hearts and memories of men, its hopes are also shocked and checked when it considers the characters of its associates, and their slight claim to be exempted from oblivion. The mansion of fame appears under this view an immense granary, in which the chaff of humanity is preserved with as much care as the grain. If we would winnow this chaff away, it can only be done by respecting the claims of truth; in short, by calling men, whether dead or living, by their right appellations. We owe, therefore, no respect to the dead, because they are dead, but only inasmuch as they were respectable while living; consequently, the maxim "*de mortuis nil nisi bonum*," is wicked and pernicious.

**THE GRAVE**

**AND**

**THE FUNERAL PILE.**





## CHAP. XI.

### THE GRAVE AND THE FUNERAL PILE.

*Vix manet è tanto parva quod urna capit!—OVID. Eleg. ix.*

IN pursuing the present argument, our chief antagonists, we apprehend, will be the undertakers, sextons, and resurrection-men; for as to the clergy, we will suppose that they would be willing, in favour of the feelings of humanity, to forego any claims they may be supposed to have upon the disposal of our dead bodies. Indeed, if it were thought necessary, they might still assist at the funeral pile; as there would be no less solemnity of feeling excited by committing our ashes to the urn, than by the present practice of lowering the undissolved body into the grave. It may possibly appear that the ceremony of cremation, or burning, would more strongly excite and accord better with our sensibilities. For it is acknowledged, that whatever feelings are generated by witnessing the interment of a friend, they are quickly dissipated by the bustle of the world; and, as few

leave behind them any durable monuments, the little mementoes which serve at first to keep his memory alive in the domestic sanctuary, being of a perishable nature, soon fade away, and verify too rapidly, the melancholy truth, that "the place that knew him shall know him no more for ever!" Men altogether destitute of imagination may say that all this is right. It may be right in the abstract that sorrow should be of short duration: but the human mind loves to repose on its griefs; and regret, when not too violent, is pleasing to it. Habit renders us worldly; but our natural craving is after such things as give us glimpses of the world of imagination, and seem to lift the veil of futurity. It need not be feared that the memory of any one will last too long; no art can evade the tooth of Time; he gnaws our reputation as surely as he does our cerecloth; and if for a while he seems to respect any particular names, it is because he needs be in no hurry; he can afford them a long scope and come up with them at last.

Before great Agamemnon reigned,  
Reigned kings as great as he, and brave,  
Whose huge ambition's now contained  
In the small compass of a grave;  
In endless night they sleep, unwept, unknown;  
No bard had they *to make all time their own!*

There may come a time, Horace! when Aga-

memnon himself shall sleep unknown, and even thy verses be forgotten. Our present arguments, however, apply to much quicker marches of oblivion; we are not now looking forward to the revolution of Plato's year; the turn of a century, or even of a simple generation, will perform our business, and place us with the kings who lived "ante Agamemnona!" In speaking, therefore, of preserving the memory of the dead, we mean, for a year or two; just long enough to allow their virtues or vices to do their offices, as examples in society. That this might be done more effectually by inurning than inhumation we are fully persuaded; for there is nothing awful or even decent in a city churchyard, and in the country, superstition mars all practical deductions. The former looks like a place where worn-out humanity is thrown, that it may be kept out of sight and memory; and raises disgust and horror.\* Now it

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\* We ask our readers whether the Pagan custom of burning the dead be not somewhat less shocking to the feelings than the following Christian mode of burial:—"We drove to the *Campo Santo*, the great *Golgotha* of Naples. It is situated on a rising ground behind the town, about a mile and a half from the gate. Within its walls are 365 caverns; one is opened every day for the reception of the dead, the great mass of whom, as soon as the rites of religion have been performed, are brought here for sepulture. There were fifteen cast in while we were there, men, women, and children, without a rag

is certainly desirable that none of these ideas should be connected in anticipation with death. It ought, we think, to be our aim to strip it as much as possible of all its terrors; in order that men might look to the end of life, if not with cheerfulness, at least without fear and shuddering. This serenity of anticipation is not to be attained by leading the imagination through the horrors of tombs and cemeteries, where the ruins of all that was ever wise or beautiful amongst men lie at the mercy of worms and corruption; where the unfeeling sexton kicks the head of a philo-

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to cover them; literally fulfilling the words of scripture:— ‘As he came forth out of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came!’ I looked down into this frightful charnel house;—it was a shocking sight—a mass of blood and garbage;—for many of the bodies had been opened at the hospitals. Cockroaches, and other reptiles, were crawling about in all their glory. ‘We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots, that’s the end!’ We made the sexton of this dreary abode, who, by the way, had been employed in this daily work for eleven years, open the stone of the next day’s grave, which had been sealed up for a year. The flesh was entirely gone, for, in such a fermenting mass, the work of corruption must go on swimmingly. Quick-lime is added to hasten the process, and nothing seemed to remain but a dry heap of bones and skulls. What must be the feelings of those who can suffer the remains of a friend, a sister, a mother, or a wife to be thus disposed of? ”—*Matthew’s Diary of an Invalid*, vol. i. p. 255.

sopher as he would that of a dog; where vice and virtue appear blended and confounded by death. Out upon the taste of that people who first invented common cemeteries! It was a barbarous and unintellectual notion.

Not that these things are of any moment to the dead: the *King of Terrors* has no terrors for those whom he has conquered; he is dreadful only as long as he is feared, and never tramples unfeelingly on the enemies he has subdued. But the *living* have an interest in coming near a power with whom they must one day be so familiar; and this cannot be done by removing immediately his triumphs from their eyes. They should accustom themselves to think upon his works, and that with composure and without affectation. To render this possible, nothing could be so efficacious as burning the bodies of the dead. The purifying action of the elements would in this practice take place before our eyes; our friends would quickly be reduced to inodorous ashes; which, kept separate by proper contrivances from that of the pile, might be carefully deposited in an urn of marble, alabaster, metal, or clay, as might be most convenient; and this could be preserved in our houses for a long course of generations. To filial piety, to friendship, or to love, how precious, how sacred a deposit! How often

should we steal at midnight to bedew these urns with our tears! There is no house so poor that it might not afford some small closet for a sanctuary to these domestic monuments of its inmates' affections. In them the manes of the mother would still seem to be present among her children; the image of the husband or wife would be there to be evoked at any time by its deserted partner; and the innocent souls of children would appear to smile and linger round their sculptured urns. What a rich nursery of affection and virtue! How different from the cold habit of dismissing those we love from our sight, the moment Death has put his hand upon them. Who would not feel warmed and quickened as if by the rays of some other sun, did he possess the ashes of Shakespeare or Milton, preserved in gold or marble, and placed on a pedestal near his pillow! As often as the rays of the moon streamed upon them through his lattice, he would seem to feel their illustrious shades near him, exalting his genius and purifying his soul. How much more, could he call them his ancestors and progenitors!

The supporters and arguers in favour of the things that be, may possibly pretend to see something extremely shocking in our proposal to burn his Majesty's Christian subjects, though it be after they are dead. But such persons are like-

wise great enemies to innovation, and would be chiefly apt, we think, to oppose us on the present occasion, through their looking on the ancient rite of burning as such. It has prevailed, however, in all quarters and ages of the world; though, it must be confessed, the practice of interring the dead seems, from what is related of the patriarchs and others, to be still more ancient. But the rite of burning was not unknown to the Hebrews: the men of Jabesh burned the body of Saul; and we learn from the prophet Amos, that, to guard against infection, the bodies of such as died of any epidemic disease were burned. Among the Pagans we can trace the funeral pile up to the most remote antiquity: the bodies of Archemorus and Menecius, slain in the Theban war, as well as those of Achilles, Patroclus, and Hector, were consumed upon the pile. We find also that cremation was in use among the Heruli, Getes, Thracians, Celts, Sarmatians, Germans, Gauls, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and Carthaginians.\* The ancient Persians and Chaldeans did not burn their dead, because they held it impious to pollute their deity (fire) with a carcass. The Egyptians abstained from it through a superstitious opinion

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\* Sir Thomas Browne, *Treatise on Urn Burial*.

that the soul subsisted only as long as the body remained undissolved, or, as some have thought, through an obscure hope of a resurrection or reunion of the soul and body. Hence the practice of embalming, that on the return of the spirit, it might find its ancient mansion unchanged in form and feature. Numa gave orders that his body should not be burned; which Sir Thomas Browne conjectures to have arisen from his intercourse with Pythagoras, who might have contracted in Egypt a horror for the ceremony: but we learn from Cicero and Livy, that Pythagoras was contemporary with the elder Brutus. Sir Thomas was therefore led away by popular error, in entertaining this opinion. The Romans do not seem, however, to have practised burning until much later than Numa; Pliny relating that, according to tradition, Lucius Sylla was the first whose body was burned at Rome. Tradition was in this instance mistaken: in the laws of the Twelve Tables we find these words—"Hominem mortuum in urbe ne sepelito, neve urito:"—*neither bury nor burn any dead body in the city.* Directions were also given that the funeral fire should be made with planed wood, and the flames quenched with wine. But the Romans had a curious notion about the impropriety of burning



the bodies of children, who died before they had *cut their teeth*,\* (to use a familiar phrase :) sometimes they were buried beneath the eaves of their houses,† but more frequently perhaps in the earth, as Juvenal talks of being moved by meeting the pomp of their funerals in the street :

Naturæ imperio gemimus, &c.

in English :—

———Tears steal from our eyes, when in the street  
With some bethrothed virgin's hearse we meet;  
Or infant's funeral, from the cheated womb  
Conveyed to earth, and cradled in a tomb.—*Tate.*

In which, however, we find nothing of the *minor igne rogi* (too small for the funeral fire) that denotes the peculiar practice of which we have been speaking.

Why the early Christians, who must, from the beginning, have been familiar with these rites, should have been altogether averse from the funeral pile, it is not easy to conjecture; unless, indeed, we suppose that they chose to sanctify every ceremony which served to distinguish them from the Pagans, or were all desirous of disposing of their mortal remains in the manner in which Christ's had been deposited. But a custom adopted

\* Priusquam genito dente cremari, mos gentium non est.  
Plin. l. vi. c. 16.

† Fab. Planciades.

without reason, (since none appears why cremation should not be considered as favourable to piety as interment,) may certainly be withstood, when it can be proved to make against the peace and interests of humanity. Were the practice of burning adopted universally, no one need fear that the remains of his wife or children might be dragged from their grave, by the sacrilegious hands of robbers, and sold to surgeons for dissection. These apprehensions would be dissipated with the smoke of the funeral pile. Nor would the timid and nervous feel half the horror they now do at the approach of death; for in so visible and complete a dissolution, the fancy would be able to attach no consciousness to any particle of the remains, which, whatever may be said, it is apt to do when it considers how small is the outward alteration wrought by death. The practice of burning would likewise do away with the necessity of common cemeteries; and with that the belief of ghosts, and all the *diablerie* which, in the country, subsists upon graves and churchyards. Those, however, for whom the aspect of a cemetery has certain melancholy charms, might still deposit the ashes of their friends in tombs or mausoleums; \* by which whatever is pious and

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\* Artemesia mixed the ashes of her husband in wine, and drank it. The Indians, according to Herodotus, were in

pleasing in the rite of inhumation, would be united to the wholesome and purifying consequences of the funeral pile. But men of a certain cast of thinking, by which they are lifted above the prejudices that disturb the minds of the people, would, in death as in life, prefer a degree of simplicity and modesty, to the pomp and magnificence which are the objects of vulgar ambition. Trimalchio, in Petronius, giving orders amid his cups for the conduct of his funeral and the construction of his tomb, is a good satire upon the feelings which sometimes agitate human vanity in the last scene it has to play in this world. "Let not my wife's statue," said he, (they had just quarrelled,) "be placed upon my monument, lest even in death I should have contentions with her. And, that she may know I have it in my power to torment her, let her not kiss me after I am dead." \* The same worthy thus begins his orders for his monu-

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the habit of eating their deceased parents, which Chrysippus wanted to introduce into general practice.—Such are the fancies of men!

\* Petron. Arbit. Satyr. t. i. p. 304.—Trimalchio (by whom he meant Nero,) alludes, in this place, to the ancient custom, by which, as soon as a man was dead, his wife, relations, and friends, ran and kissed his face as a mark of their affection for him. Mistresses hung upon their lover's lips, in order to imbibe his soul, which was supposed to depart through the mouth.

ment. "I earnestly entreat you to place at the foot of my tomb the statue of my favourite bitch, with crowns, boxes of perfume, and representations of all the battles I have won, in relief, that by your assistance I may live after death. Let the façade of the structure be one hundred feet long; its depth two hundred feet. I desire also that all manner of fruit-trees be planted round my ashes, especially vines; for it would be absurd to give room for it to be said after my death, that, although I spared no pains in cultivating my lands during life, that spot had been neglected in which I must dwell for a so much longer period." \*

Plato and Sir Thomas Browne, the one in his most beautiful piece entitled the Banquet, and the other in his treatise on Urn Burial, have with the keenest ridicule assaulted man's absurd practices for perpetuating his memory. The latter, indeed, affected to look upon all methods as ineffectual and absurd; because, as he thought, we had fallen in the evening of time, merely soon enough to say we had lived, but too near the world's goal, to allow the echoes of our virtues to be heard upon the earth. Plato, on the contrary, as conceiving probably that he lived in the morning of the world, was not averse to reputation; only, he

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\* Idem. t. i. p. 286.

thought it was to be acquired, not by preserving our bodies from corruption by embalming, or by raising over our ashes piles of marble or tombs of brass, or by being the founder of a family distinguished for nothing but riches,—but by generating noble and magnanimous thoughts.

It cannot be denied that there is something exceedingly impressive in seeing any remnant of humanity going to join “the mighty nations of the dead,” in whatever manner it is effected. The presence of Death with his terrors has sometimes an ennobling effect upon the survivors ; they feel for a moment as if they could willingly cope with him, while his dart is scarcely extracted from the bosom of their friend. How much of a heroine does even a peasant girl or forlorn widow appear, in the pomp of grief and tears, while the lover or the husband is borne by hands made hard with labour, to his long home beneath the turf of some village church-yard. But the stern pathos of these scenes might be heightened by the ceremonies of the funeral pile. When it was a youth, in those times when burning prevailed, that was cut off in the flower of his age, or a virgin before the period of womanhood, the mother, if she unhappily survived, or else some near relation, wrapped in a sad-coloured garment, gathered up the beloved

ashes into an urn ; \* and little vases of perfumes and bottles of essences (afterwards mistaken for tears,) were deposited with it in the tomb, while lamentations and sorrow were heard on all sides. The funeral supper, borne in upon pateræ, was then tasted by the relations, who wore crowns upon their heads,† and at stated periods these lamentations were renewed.

But the practice of burying in churches is doubly objectionable, as it injures alike our piety and health.

The character of our devotion should be pure and cheerful, and the places set apart for its public exercise ought rather to increase than diminish the natural exaltation of the mind. For this reason lightness and elegance should be aimed at in the architecture of our churches, and every thing offensive and gloomy removed from their vicinity. Pure sublimity might be preferable, if it were within the reach of ordinary architects, for such are the persons generally employed in building churches ; but every attempt at reaching it only proves that they mistake gloom and obscurity for the sublime, and, in consequence, only depress the souls they mean to raise and purify.

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\* *Antiquitates Middletonianæ.*

† *Cicero de Legib.*

Added to this, our dead are interred in our temples, and putrid exhalations float like mist through those aisles which should be sacred to the breath of praise alone. It is a great mistake, if it be thought that greater veneration is through these means paid to our sacred edifices. Men feel an involuntary sinking of the spirit on entering them, but it is caused, not by any accession of penitential feelings, but by inhaling a fetid, unwholesome atmosphere; and through life they associate a certain heavy, cadaverous scent with every reminiscence of a church. Besides, nothing is more certain than that the sight and smell of mortality may be endured without any increase of virtuous or moral feelings. The Arabs of the Nile lie down, without any observable emendation of morals, beside the crumbling mummies in the ancient sepulchres of the Egyptians; and the early Christians retired to the tombs of the martyrs, that they might enjoy, according to St. Ambrose, the advantage of getting intoxicated with impunity. On warm summer days, when the sun has darted his rays through the long dim windows of a country church, we have often observed bluish steams ascending heavily towards the roof of the building; and these, mingling with the breath of a numerous congregation, have so depressed our spirits, that we have been overwhelmed with me-

lancholy. How different were the taste and notions of the Pagans ! Though their gods and their rites were sometimes impure, it was very rarely that their temples were profaned by any thing calculated to create disgust, and never by the presence of a dead body. Nay their scrupulous delicacy was so great in this respect, that they suspended boughs of cypress at the doors of deceased persons, lest any one about to perform some religious rite, should enter a house rendered contaminated, and unpropitious by the presence of a corpse. This may have been carrying the matter too far, but it was a proof of respect for the objects of their religion.

Our notions of death are sought by every means to be rendered more gloomy ; while the Pagans were anxious to strip them, as much as possible, of that characteristic, though their hopes of futurity were much more vague and cheerless. We fear that difference of creed, however, has very little to do with natural feelings, for we find from the reproaches of the fathers, that even the primitive Christians were accustomed to abandon themselves to excessive grief on the death of their friends, and, not content with their own tears, to hire *Præficæ*, or mercenary female mourners, who might lengthen and direct their grief by art and method. And, though they did not practise burn-



ing, much of the pomp and expense of the funeral pile was preserved, or rather augmented; for Tertullian informs the Arabs, that they had no reason to regret the decay of Paganism, since a greater quantity of their precious odours were used at the funerals of the Christians than formerly had been burnt on the altars of the Gods.

The practice of cremation, is indeed the most economical way in which the dead can be disposed of; and it is certainly a mistaken notion to think we honour our departed friends by depriving those that are living of gifts which we heap upon their ashes. Towards neither dead nor living is the fervency of our affections proved by the price of our gifts. A common urn might be purchased for a few shillings, and with such the poor would be content; while the rich might show their regret or extravagance by sculptured marble or alabaster. What is now expended on a coffin would buy wood for the pile; and as to the perfumes anciently used, their place might be supplied by very homely expedients. Instead, also, of the planed wood, and wine to extinguish the flames, commanded by law among the Romans, common faggots and water might be substituted. The practice of inhumation has always given rise to useless labour and expense. The coffins of the ancient kings of France were immense blocks of

stone hollowed out with prodigious labour, their effigies were painted on the inside, and considerable riches were buried with them; and if they did not equal the pyramids, as a French author excellently observes, they were at least as useful.

To common-place minds every thing is common-place, and nothing more so than reflections on death; but yet what lessons might we not learn from these common-places! Let such minds grapple with this most common of all things, and see how they will fare. The most strange and marvellous of subjects would scarcely bow down their spirit so effectually, or show these despisers of common-place how they would shudder at having it thrust home to their bosoms. On such occasions are seen the advantages of those whose habits of thinking never led them to reckon death a subject beneath their contemplation, or foreign to their happiness; whose night-thoughts were wont to wander calmly among urns and sepulchres; and who, like the Egyptians, beheld their festivals accompanied by a skeleton, present to the imagination, without checking their mirth or damping their enjoyments. We should like to see the urns of our ancestors arranged on our chimney-pieces with their various dates sculptured on their sides, that we might never forget the duration of human life, or be angry at what are em-

phatically called "the ups and downs" of this world. As it is, we keep a strict debtor and creditor account with Time, and complacently reckon up at stated periods what we have gained by yielding up certain portions of our lives to his sway. We shall see who will be the gainer in the end! Meanwhile it is our wish that our country would adopt the healthful, pious, and economical practice of what Sir Thomas Browne calls "the fiery solution," and yield up the dead bodies of its people rather to purifying flames, than to worms and corruption.



**SPECIMEN**  
**OF**  
**ANCIENT CHARACTER.**



## CHAP. XII.

### SPECIMEN OF ANCIENT CHARACTER.

Seize then, my soul! from freedom's trophied dome  
The harp which, hanging high between the shields  
Of BRUTUS and LEONIDAS, oft gives  
A fitful music to the breezy touch  
Of patriot spirits that demand their fame.

SOUTHEY'S JOAN OF ARC.

Marcus Brutus . . . . . étoit le plus grand Republicain que l'on vit jamais.

BAYLE.

THE mind which feels itself drawn, by any strong attraction, towards virtue, naturally looks abroad among its contemporaries, or the celebrated personages of history, to discover, if possible, some great character approximating in tone and qualities to itself. When it imagines it has found such a character, a glow of feeling something resembling friendship arises, and seems ever after to subsist, and to be strengthened perpetually by a secret recurrence to the illustrious name. There is something, indeed, extremely noble in the intercourse of our imaginations with the *manes* of the

dead, which purifies the soul from all the meaner passions, and much more surely nerves and fortifies it against suffering, than most of those actual connexions which obtain the name of friendship in the world. The reason is very plain: a man, when he has all the great of the past world before him, will hardly choose to place his admiration upon a common character; for, as we all have a good opinion of ourselves, he would not think that such a character resembled him in the least. His choice will rather be directed towards a man, who, together with a few similar intellectual features, possessed very great qualities, and whose character, therefore, must always remain a fine subject for imitation. Young men who read Plutarch very early are sure to find a favourite amongst his heroes; for his work is a kind of banqueting-room, in which you sit down to table with the most illustrious men of all ages. For my own part, I acquired, I know not how early, an unaccountable and vehement predilection for Marcus Brutus; and although I have since heard a good deal said against him, it has not been of a nature to make me change my opinion. It has always appeared to me, that the popular institutions of Greece and Rome were a kind of rich soil in which humanity shot up, like a cedar on Lebanon, into the very heights of heaven. There was not, in fact, any



thing, in those states, between man and God ; the sense of sovereignty and power circulated like his blood through the veins of the citizen ; it was present to his mind upon all occasions ; and Xenophon adduces it to the ten thousand as a reason why they should beat the Persians, that they did not, like them, acknowledge any earthly master. In looking back upon antiquity, however, we should recollect that *all* was not like what remains ; but every thing that was perishable having been laid waste by the tide of time, the few forms which still survive, and which we discover by the light of history standing above the reach of its waves, like the vast idols of Egypt towering over the waters of the inundation, are such as will be co-lasting with the world. They are become a part of nature, and must be imperishable, like her. The time, therefore, which we spend in making ourselves familiar with these ancient characters, is very far from being misemployed, as they seem to shed around them an odour of virtue which refreshes the mind.

The history of Marcus Brutus is much too well known to render it necessary for us to enter into any detail of his actions : our object is, to look at his character. If this could be done without referring at all to what he did, there would be no temptation to relate any thing after

Plutarch, which must render a man liable to be made the subject of a disadvantageous comparison. But, except through his actions, we have no means of knowing him; and, on this account, must refer perpetually to matters of history, which the reader will of course remember well enough, but which we must sometimes repeat, in order that we may not appear to give imperfect views of things.

There are strong reasons for believing that Marcus Brutus was descended from that Brutus who expelled the kings from Rome. Dionysius of Halicarnassus endeavours, it is true, to prove that he could not be descended from him, and adduces this reason, amongst others—that the younger Brutus was a plebeian, and Lucius Junius a patrician. But this is not decisive, as there were many examples of patrician families becoming plebeian. Suetonius instances, amongst others, the Octavian family. The reason generally was, that such families desired the possession of the tribuneship, which could not be held by a patrician. However this may be—and it is not of much consequence—it was the opinion of Cicero, and of the Roman people in general, that Marcus Brutus derived his race from the old Junian stock. To confute the vulgar notion that he was Cæsar's son, it will be sufficient to mention, that

Cæsar was only fifteen years old when he was born, and did not become acquainted with his mother, Servilia, until many years afterwards. His father, whose name also was Marcus Junius Brutus, having been put to death by Pompey, he was left, at a very early age, to the care of his uncle Cato, who provided him masters to instruct him in learning and philosophy. His attachment to the Stoic sect arose, very probably, from this connexion with his uncle; but he did not entirely embrace the doctrines of Zeno: his philosophy was a mixture of the system of the Old Academy with that of the Portico. His love of knowledge was intense; he studied the doctrines of all the philosophers, and understood them thoroughly; he was fond, also, of oratory, and entertained in his house not only philosophers, but orators, as well as some young men who had studied rhetoric with him. He married the daughter of Appius Pulcher, when he was very young, but their union appears to have been unhappy: for when Cato's daughter, Portia, became a widow, he made use of the facilities afforded by the laws of his country, to obtain a divorce, was separated from his first wife, and married his cousin. Portia appears to have been a wife worthy of him; a similar education had fitted them for each other, and the happiness they enjoyed, when at length united, is a strong

testimony in favour of the law of divorce, as it existed amongst the Romans.

It was not, however, for domestic happiness, or a life of study, that Brutus had been born: the republic was verging towards its dissolution, and that field of honour and renown, in which he was preparing himself to gather those laurels that are only to be gained in a free state, was rapidly devastated by the most terrible civil wars. Cæsar and Pompey were now drawing the forces of the commonwealth into two parts; and the soldiers, on whichever side they stood, appeared to forget the republic, in their attachment to their chiefs. But Pompey was certainly the general of the state, and Cæsar a rebel; and for this reason, Brutus experienced no difficulty in determining to join Pompey, although he was his private enemy, while Cæsar was known to entertain a strong friendship for him. This action is an index to his whole character. Pompey had killed his father, on which account there was the most deadly hatred between them, Brutus shunning and showing his aversion for him upon all occasions. Cæsar loved him exceedingly, and was, in return, beloved by him; yet, when these two men came to make war upon each other — when they came to stand up, one for their common country, the other for himself, private affection

had no weight with Brutus ; he joined his enemy against his friend, *because his enemy's cause was the more just*. If any man's whole soul was ever absorbed by patriotism, it was Brutus's upon this occasion.

When Brutus came to join Pompey in his camp in Macedonia, the latter was so overjoyed at the unexpected event, "that he rose to embrace him in the presence of his guards, and treated him with as much respect as if he had been his superior." The camp was necessarily a scene of much confusion, as preparations were then making for the battle of Pharsalia, while every heart was agitated by musing on the uncertainty of the event : the season of the year, also, was summer, and the heat excessive ; yet amidst these untoward circumstances Brutus calmly pursued his studies, and, on the very evening before the battle, employed himself in abridging Polybius. The event of this action, the escape of Brutus from the camp when Cæsar was storming it after the battle, his hiding in a marsh among the reeds, his flight to Larissa, and subsequent reconciliation with Cæsar, the reader will remember from Plutarch : but there is a circumstance connected with this reconciliation which must be noticed, as it is one of those things for which Brutus has been blamed. It appears that when Pompey had fled towards

the sea, and escaped with his fleet, various opinions were entertained by Cæsar's friends concerning the country in which it was probable he would take refuge, some conjecturing one region, and some another. Things standing thus, Cæsar went out of his tent with Brutus, and, as they walked about the camp, contrived to discover *his opinion* on the subject : finding that he supposed Egypt would be the country, Cæsar slighted the conjectures of his other friends, and prepared to lead his forces in that direction. Now, it has been pretended, that in disclosing to Cæsar his suspicions regarding the retreat of Pompey, Brutus was guilty of a serious fault. But, "in the first place," as Bayle observes, "Pompey had not confided to him in any manner the secret of his retreat ; secondly, it was not possible for him to conceive how he could render worse the unhappy destiny of the fugitive by communicating his conjectures to Cæsar ; besides, it is likely that he looked upon Egypt to be an asylum of such strength as would deter the conqueror from going thither to attack the great Pompey."

The republic being now in the hands of Cæsar, Brutus was appointed Governor of Cisalpine Gaul, where, by the wisdom and humanity of his administration, he made some amends to the inhabitants for the injuries they had suffered during the

civil wars. Many of the young nobility repairing to him from Rome, he entertained them courteously, and thus rapidly increased the number of his friends; for all they who loved the republic, loved Brutus.

During the whole interval which elapsed between the battle of Pharsalia and Cæsar's death, we observe Brutus assiduous in the discharge of his duty, and aspiring to the lawful honours of the state. He composed a panegyric on his uncle and father-in-law, Cato, which Cæsar affected to consider a very poor performance. His literary works were, indeed, numerous: he abridged the Roman histories of Fannius, and Antipater, he wrote a work *De Officiis*, and another *De Virtute*, which is mentioned by Cicero and Seneca, and Diomede speaks of one, *De Patientiâ*. But all these are lost. The materials for judging of the learning and eloquence of Brutus, which time has spared, are therefore peculiarly scanty; there now remaining nothing of his, excepting a few Latin and Greek letters; the former published among those of Cicero, the latter separately. From the testimony, however, of his contemporaries, and of those ages immediately following, (which possessed his works,) we may learn that his genius was not inferior to his virtue; that in learning he surpassed all the young nobility of Rome; that

his philosophy was enlightened, his taste refined and severe. Even Cicero's eloquence did not come up to his notions of oratory: he required something still more masculine and vehement, having formed his conceptions from the style of Demosthenes. The character of his mind, and the tone of his philosophy, had infused a peculiar vigour into his own manner of speaking, which is said, upon one occasion, to have terrified Cæsar, and to have given him the first suspicion of the fierceness of Brutus's temper. Earnestness and gravity were the prevailing features in his style; the expression of his desires evinced the most intense energy; and, the fire of truth flashing perpetually through his periods, rendered unnecessary the petty flourishes of an artificial rhetoric. The oratory of Cicero could not but appear too diffuse and showy to so stern a cultivator of eloquence; especially as, while truth alone was his own aim, Cicero's often terminated in persuasion. The mind of Brutus resembled a steed in the Olympic contests, which, having to run a race of glory, sees only the goal, and bounds towards it with invincible energy; Cicero's the same steed, covered with triumphal trappings, pawing the ground with pride, and listening with evident delight to the applauding shouts of the spectators. Cicero frequently indulged his genius



in lively digressions and puns that upset the gravity of the senate. He sometimes made himself merry at the expense of the stoics, and drew a caricature of their *wise man*, which forced a smile even from Cato himself. Brutus relished nothing of this. His genius was argumentative and sublime; his chief figures of speech were candour and patriotism; and as he waved his hand on the rostrum, the Roman people might have imagined they saw truth itself enveloped in the folds of the toga. His letters breathe the same spirit. In the midst of great grandeur of thought, there is in them throughout an affectionate commiseration for the weaknesses and misfortunes of mankind. The style is suitable: brief, strong, perspicuous; without art, and without affectation.

If we carry our examination further, and observe the unfolding of his character in the relations of private life, the disappointment by which the looking upon great men in this point of view is usually attended, will not meet us here. His philosophy was, it is granted, of a rigid cast; but there does not appear to be any necessary connexion between a stern philosophy and unamiable manners. It indeed appears quite evident that Brutus made choice of the stoic dogmas as a corrective of his too gentle disposition: for, as Dr.

Middleton observes, "he was very often forced, by the tenderness of his nature, to confute the rigour of his principles." Accordingly, he was exceedingly beloved; and it is equally honourable, both to himself and to his connexions, that, during all his misfortunes, he was not deserted by a single friend. This was singular good fortune in the times in which he lived, when it was common for men to sup with one party, and be found next morning at breakfast amongst their enemies. Brutus's friends were, indeed, a remarkable circle; and that could have been no ordinary virtue which enabled him to bind them to himself. They not only preserved their attachment to him during his life, however, but even after he had fallen, when it was injurious to their fortunes to appear to have loved him. It is true, they were so numerous, and possessed of so much weight and ability, that the proper operation of government was scarcely compatible with their total exclusion from power. Octavius, therefore, felt himself compelled by his situation to feign a degree of affection for Brutus's friends. Hypocrisy, however, cost him but little: he understood his interest, and "*tolerated*," as Plutarch beautifully expresses it, "*the public respect which was paid to Brutus's memory.*" Presuming upon this *toleration*, Messala, the friend of Brutus, took occasion after his

reconciliation with Augustus, to recommend Strato to his imperial master: "This," said he, with tears, "is the man who did the last kind office for my dear Brutus."— Strato had aided Brutus in putting an end to his life.

By his choice of friends, a man's character may almost always be known; for it is in every one's power to choose virtuous friends, or to remain without any. Cæsar, as Cicero observes, was not nice in selecting *his* intimates; he indeed acknowledged that he preferred bad men who would do any thing to promote his designs, to those virtuous persons who possessed untractable consciences; and Plato reproaches Dion with having chosen unprincipled men for his associates. But all allow that Brutus selected his friends with judgment, and possessed the affection of great men, who were faithfully attached to him and his cause. As long as any of these survived, a degree of respect for his memory was kept up; but, as soon as the diadem of the Cæsars glittered over the broken fasces of the republic, it was clearly perceived that his name was destined to be covered with opprobrium. In the reign of Tiberius, Cremutius Cordus was accused, before the senate, of high treason, for having written an eulogium on Brutus and Cassius. In his defence, he sheltered himself behind the example of the historian Livy,

and of Messala Corvinus the orator; both of whom, though living under Augustus, had spoken with becoming enthusiasm of the great patriots. After such a defence, however, Cremutius did not think it safe to live, and therefore forestalled the executioner by a voluntary death. From this instance of suicide, and from many others in the early books of Tacitus's *Annals*, it seems that the contempt of life, evinced in an extraordinary manner by the people of those times, arose entirely from a despair of freedom. Having from the cradle framed their minds for the exercise of liberty, tyrannical restraint was so intolerable to them, that they willingly laid down their lives to escape from it. The example also of Brutus and Cato had much influence in recommending suicide, which, if ever excusable, was excusable in the Romans of those days.

But to proceed: as soon as it was perceived that to speak favourably of Brutus and Cassius was hateful, and to speak abusively, agreeable to the Emperors, all those who hoped for preferment at court, became loud in their clamours against them. As it was not possible to charge them with any specific crimes, calumny was compelled to shroud itself under general expressions: they were called "villains," "assassins," "parricides," &c., and the echo of these clamours appears to be

still sounding in the ears of mankind. Of course, these opprobrious terms could be applied to Brutus and Cassius only with reference to their putting Cæsar to death. This action has not yet been irrevocably referred to its class, men still disputing about the justice or injustice of it. Before I proceed to express my opinion on that head, I will beg leave to remark, that men have an inveterate propensity to judge of every thing by the event. Had Brutus succeeded in restoring the republic, even at the expense of Cæsar's life, there can be no question that they who are now most noisy in their condemnation of him, would have applauded his patriotism to the skies. Do not historians, indeed, constantly praise that Scipio who assassinated Tiberius Gracchus? Is *he* ever styled "murderer," "assassin," "parricide?" &c. Not at all; but Gracchus was ranged on the side of popular rights; and it appears that little sorrow would be felt by the writers alluded to, if all such men were despatched in the same way. Cæsar aimed at subverting the government of his country, or rather, had subverted it. Brutus's aim was the restoration of that government. Brutus was therefore the enemy of *innovation*—the champion of *establishments*. Can his enemies see nothing good in this? Oh, no! the government he laboured to restore was republican,

and they find nothing good in any thing but despotism. Well, but what if he had succeeded in re-establishing the republic? What then?—why, in doing so, he would have changed the destinies of the world. Civilization might have ran on in one uninterrupted career from that time to this, and the progress of society have been accelerated by the march of a thousand years. There is no man living who has not, as it is, received benefit from the death of Cæsar. Had Antony and Lepidus and Octavius fallen with him, Roman liberty might have lasted some centuries longer, until the world had been prepared to catch the flame from the capitol; in which case, we should have appeared to owe more than we now do, to Brutus. But we are unjust: he could not possibly foresee that Hirtius and Pansa would be slain; that Antony and Octavius and Lepidus would unite; that Cicero would mistake the character of Octavius, and overwhelm him with honours; and, unless he could have foreseen all this, he would not have been justified in cutting off Antony, or Lepidus, or Octavius.

But that he *was* justified in killing Cæsar, I proceed to prove: it is quite clear, from the universal testimony of antiquity, that an opinion prevailed in all the old republics, that any citizen might lawfully kill a tyrant; through this belief,

Harmodius and Aristogeiton slew Hipparchus at Athens ; Ahala, Sp. Melius, who did but aim at tyranny, at Rome ; and, among the Jews, we find Ehud assassinating the Moabitish King, and Jehoiadah taking off Athaliah, with other examples innumerable. At the close of the seventh book of his politics, Aristotle gives a practical illustration of the effect of this opinion in Greece. He observes, that tyrannies were never durable ; and then goes on to enumerate such as might have been supposed to militate against his doctrine. "The most lasting tyranny," says he, "on record, was that of Orthagoras and his sons at Sicyon. It continued a hundred years !" The second example given, is that of Cypselus and his family at Corinth, which lasted seventy-seven years and six months. The third, that of the Peisistratidæ at Athens, continued only thirty-five years. The Greeks, we see, knew how to put their opinions in practice. They were "animated," said Montesquieu, "with a predominating love of their country, which, overstepping the ordinary rules of crimes and virtues, listened to that alone, and saw neither citizen, nor friend, nor benefactor, nor father ; virtue seemed to forget, in order to surpass herself ; and the action which might at first be disapproved as sanguinary, was, through her influence, admired as divine !"

This sentiment was at Rome embodied into a law. Upon the expulsion of the Tarquins, the Romans, experiencing the delights of freedom, decreed, that whoever should be found *aiming at royalty*, might be put to death by any private citizen, without the forms of law; for they rightly judged, that the man who endeavoured at the subversion of all law was not entitled to its protection. All they required of the tyrannicide was, that he should be able to bring *proofs* that the person he had put to death had entertained the designs imputed to him. Valerius Publicola was the author of this law. These are Plutarch's words:—"He made it lawful, without form of trial, to kill any man that should attempt to set himself up for king; and the person who took away his life, was to stand excused, if he could adduce proof of the intended crime. His reason for such a law, we presume, was this: though it is not possible that he, who undertakes so great an enterprise, should escape all notice; yet it is very probable that, even if suspected, he may accomplish his designs before he can be brought to answer for it in a judicial way; *and as the crime, if committed, would prevent his being called to account for it at all, this law empowered any one to punish him before any cognizance was taken.*" Publicola also made it death to enter upon the



magistracy without the people's consent. The consular laws, likewise, published immediately after the overthrow of the Decemvirate, made it capital to create magistrates without reference and appeal to the people. "*Ne quis ullum magistratum sine provocatione crearet : qui creasset, eum jus fasque esset occidi : neve ea cædes capitalis noxa haberetur.*" Whoever injured any tribune of the people, his head also was devoted to Jupiter ; that is, he was condemned to death. Moreover, there was a decree of the senate, passed expressly for the security of Rome, which devoted to the Infernal Gods whoever should pass the Rubicon with an army, a legion, or a cohort : this decree may still be seen engraven upon stone, on the road between Rimini and Cesena. Such were the laws of Rome.

Now we shall see how these laws were set at nought and broken by Cæsar. That he passed the Rubicon with an army, I have no need to prove ; and while proving the remainder, shall, I fear, require a considerable portion of the reader's indulgence.

A part of the public treasure of Rome was laid up in the temple of Saturn, never to be drawn from thence, unless in case of a war with the Gauls. The keys of the temple were in the hands of a tribune. When Cæsar parricidically entered

the city with his troops, the first thing which occurred to him was, to rob this temple; and, accordingly, he immediately hastened thither, where he found the tribune at his post, ready to withstand his entry. Upon this he grew enraged, and, advancing towards the tribune, exclaimed —“Give way, Metellus, or I will strike you dead at my feet!—And you know, young man,” he added, in a milder tone,—“it is much easier for me *to do it* than to say it.” Let the reader observe the full meaning of this speech:—the law, as we have shown, made the persons of the tribunes sacred, and acknowledged *no power* that could injure them; in averring, therefore, that it was easy for him to put one of these sacred magistrates to death, Cæsar did in effect acknowledge that he had set himself above the laws; that he had placed himself in that position in which they had armed the hands of every citizen against his life.

But this was not the only time in which Cæsar invaded the laws in the persons of the tribunes; for, returning one day through the city, after the sacrifice of the Latian Festivals, the people accompanied him with shouts and acclamations. Upon this, one of his creatures crowned his statue with laurel. The two tribunes who were present, perceiving the drift of the whole affair, commanded the wretch to be taken into custody, and the

crown to be removed, at which the tyrant felt so much anger that he displaced the tribunes from their offices. Upon another occasion, he observed to a tribune who had *presumed to sit in his presence*, "Well done, tribune Aquilla, you had better try if you can wrest the government of the commonwealth out of my hands with your tribuneship!" and by way of mockery and contempt, he promised nothing to any one, for several days after, but with this expression: "If Pontius Aquilla consents."

He had, therefore, usurped the supreme power, and only wanted the name of king. To show, indeed, that he had emancipated himself from the obedience due to his country's laws, he bestowed the honours of the consulship, and of all other magistracies, without consulting or convening the people. Upon one occasion, the regular consul dying a few hours before the year expired, he conferred the dignity upon one of his friends for the remaining time; upon which occasion, Cicero said: "Let us make haste, and pay our compliments to the consul before his office expires." And again: "Our consul is a man of so much strictness and rigour, that not a man of us has dined, supped, or slept, during his magistracy." Plutarch observes, that Cæsar wished *to reign* over a willing people; *but his impatience to be a king*, (says Dr.

Middleton,) defeated all his projects. And Suetonius, after impartially summing up his good and bad deeds, declares that he was justly slain : “ *Jure cæsus existimetur.*” For he disposed of offices and honours (says he) in contempt of his country’s laws — “*spreto patriæ more,*” “*ac nullus non honores ad libidinem recepit et dedit ;*” he took and bestowed all the offices of the state at his pleasure. He had, besides, the audacity to declare, that he had reduced the republic to a mere name : “The commonwealth,” said he “is now nothing but a word, without body or soul.” To this he added, that hereafter he was to be spoken to with more reverence ; and that every word he uttered was to be looked upon as a law. Lord Bacon observes, that “Cæsar did himself infinite hurt in that speech,—‘*Sylla nescivit literas, non potuit dictare ;*’ for it did utterly cut off that hope which men had entertained, that he would, at one time or other, give over his dictatorship.”

It is clear, therefore, that Cæsar was lawfully and justly slain, which, as Middleton remarks, was the opinion of the best, the wisest, and the most disinterested in Rome, at the time when the fact was committed. “Cent mille vies,” says Bayle, “s’il les avoit eues, n’auroient pas suffi à l’expiation de son crime.” He thinks, however,

that it was not for *two or three* private individuals to undertake his punishment; and applies on this occasion the old maxim, "*Passio justa; actio injustissima.*" But Bayle must have forgotten the Valerian law.

Many persons, however, who are willing to allow that Cæsar deserved his fate, refuse, nevertheless, to acknowledge that Brutus was right in putting him to death. They have a notion, that because Cæsar had conferred favours on Brutus, and refrained from taking away his life when he might easily have done it, it was, therefore, the duty of the latter to suffer him quietly to enslave his country; because, say they, how could Brutus rise up against Cæsar without ingratitude,—without trampling on the laws of friendship? in short, without being a villain and a murderer? Men certainly entertain very different opinions about the extent of the duties which we owe our country; some imagining it is not to be served at the expense of a boon companion; others, that we ought first to take care of ourselves and our families, and give the remainder of our energies to the commonwealth; while there have, in all ages, been a few on whom no views of interest, no ties of friendship or affection, could ever operate to turn them aside for a moment from pursuing the public good. Nay, some have carried their

devotion to their country so far, as to affirm, that for its sake we ought to be ready to suffer the loss not only of our fortunes and of our lives, but, should it be necessary, of our very fame and reputation. “*Ea caritas patriæ est,*” said Lentulus to the soldiers at Caudium, “*ut tam ignominiâ eam, quam morte nostra, si opus sit, servamus.*” This, we are all aware, is unpalatable logic, for it levels the last stronghold of selfishness,—our desire of renown; but whoever has elevated his reason to admit its conclusions, is a man above the ordinary pitch of humanity. In the case before us, Brutus could not have been ignorant that, in attacking Cæsar, he was subjecting himself to the suspicion of being nothing more than an ambitious man, incapable of bearing a superior, and envious of a fame which he could not hope to rival. He must have known, too, that it was possible for him to fail in his enterprise, and thus be cut off entirely from every possibility of explaining his views; while he was subject to be represented to posterity as a mere assassin, who had no aim but interest or revenge. He must, therefore, have thought with Lentulus that the chance of ignominy was to be hazarded for the good of Rome; for had the preservation of his own glory been the chief motive of his actions, he had but one course to pursue: to submit to the

yoke of Cæsar, in order to participate in his power. Great men, however, do not act wholly for reputation, as many appear to imagine; they feel within themselves a bias towards noble deeds, and perform them, careless of any other reward than the consciousness of their virtue. Were it, in fact, within their power to choose between the praise and the blame of those who blame or praise without reflection, they would be altogether indifferent, as a man is indifferent whether the people of New Zealand interest themselves in his fame or not. Virtue, being always sure of the sympathy of virtue, is careless of every thing beyond. As to Cæsar, he was incapable of this degree of virtue, and condescended to falsify his own actions, in the hopes of escaping the just condemnation of posterity. With this view, he wrote his 'Commentaries,' in which Asinius Pollio declared he had misrepresented the truth on many occasions: we are sure enough that he did so in the affair of the temple of Saturn, and it is clear from this, that he dreaded the avenging pen of history. Nevertheless he has been detected. We know, in spite of his 'Commentaries,' that he robbed the public treasury, and would have murdered the magistrate, whom the republic had placed as a guard over it, if he had not ceased to resist his injustice. The patriots who put him to death

wrote no Commentaries, not being ashamed of the deed, nor of the principles which led them to perform it ; for in a letter to Cicero, Brutus himself avows, that had Cæsar been his father he must have acted as he did. Has history, in all her other pages, any thing comparable to this ? Can the human mind conceive a virtue more sublime ? For my part I agree with Swift, in enumerating Brutus amongst that sextumvirate, to which all the ages of the world cannot add a seventh. I may, perhaps, be carried away by my enthusiasm for the character of this great man, whose mind, according to Plutarch, the Deity had peculiarly fitted for the habitation of virtue ; but it is a remarkable fact, that no one ever attempted to unravel the texture of his character, without experiencing very violent feelings of affection or antipathy. The reason may be, he is identified in men's minds with the principle of liberty ; and therefore, when we speak of Brutus, we speak not merely of a man who studied philosophy and killed a tyrant at Rome ; but of that innate detestation of tyranny which uncorrupted man always feels. His name has a golden sound in the ears of integrity, makes our blood flow more briskly and warmly in our veins, and adds to the dignity of human nature itself. If I stood alone in this sentiment, though I might not think it



less just on that account, I should, perhaps, hesitate to obtrude it upon the world. But if I am wrong, I am wrong in very good company; for from Cicero to Swift, there has scarcely been a great writer who might not be reckoned among the admirers of Brutus. "You know," says Cicero to a friend, "I have always loved Marcus Brutus on account of his great genius, his suavity of manners, his singular probity and fortitude. But the ides of March" (the day on which he killed Cæsar) "have so increased my affection, that I have wondered there should have been room to add to that which before appeared full, even to overflowing." \* Swift's expressions are hardly less strong: "The governor, at my request, gave the sign for Cæsar and Brutus to advance towards us. I was struck with a profound veneration at the sight of Brutus, and could easily discover the most consummate virtue, the greatest intrepidity and firmness of mind, the truest love of his country, and general benevolence for mankind in every lineament of his countenance. I observed, with much pleasure, that these two persons were in good intelligence with each other; and Cæsar freely confessed to me, that the greatest actions of his own life were not equal, by many degrees, to the glory of taking it away." †

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\* Epist. ad Familiares, ix. 14.

† Gulliver's Travels, pt. 3. iii. c. 7.

Even his enemies acknowledge that his virtue was of the most exalted kind. "He was perfect in every respect," says Paterculus, "but soiled all his virtues by *assassinating* Cæsar." We have seen that Cicero considered this the greatest virtue of all, and it is very certain that those men who love liberty will participate in the sentiment of Cicero. Algernon Sidney, a great name with all noble-minded men, proposed Brutus, as the model of his life, which did not in any manner disgrace the original. It would be easy to find testimonies in favour of Brutus, but I shall have thrown away my labour, if the reader still stand in need of them to form his opinion of the man, after what has been now written. In the hope that he will not, I shall close this essay with a brief sketch of the death of this illustrious Roman; and the reader will excuse me if I dwell for a moment on sad and melancholy images, for there were no others connected with the death of Brutus. He had toiled and was about to bleed for his country; but he had toiled and was to bleed in vain. No grateful people pressed round his death-bed, to bless him for homes made happy, and for liberties restored. The glories of the republic in which he was born, and which had infused incalculable energies into the minds of men, were now about to fade for ever with him. It was the re-

flecting on this circumstance, that made men attribute to him the celebrated apostrophe to virtue, which there is no reason to believe he ever uttered; for, instead of considering it an empty name, he comforted both himself and his friends with the reflection, that through the consciousness of having always fulfilled its dictates, he was even then far happier than his conquerors. "It is an infinite satisfaction to me," said he, "that all my friends have been faithful. If I am angry with FORTUNE, it is for the sake of my country. Myself I esteem more happy than the conquerors, not only in respect of my past, *but also my present situation*. I shall leave behind me that reputation for *virtue*, which they, with all their wealth and power, will never acquire. For posterity will not scruple to believe, that they were an abandoned and worthless set of men, who destroyed the good and the virtuous for the sake of unjust empire." From this it would appear, that if Brutus uttered any apostrophe on this occasion, it was addressed to *Fortune*, not to *Virtue*; for virtue has never been thought to regulate the events of war; whereas the ancients attributed great influence in such affairs to fortune. We see, therefore, that although pressed down by the most grievous calamities, dying an outcast, defeated, houseless, forsaken by fortune, Brutus was not unequal to the event. In

order to comprehend, with a tolerable degree of fulness, the circumstances which made this event terrible, let the reader imagine this great soldier retiring in the darkness from the route of Philippi, with the friends of his youth and better days clinging round him to the last. Let him sit down with Brutus in his concealment among rocks and thickets, and accompany his thoughts, struggling through the agony of his soul towards Rome. There borrowing for a moment a Roman's eyes and feelings, let him picture him to himself, taking leave for ever of the Forum, which had so often thundered with the voice of liberty; let him observe the indignant spirit of a free people crushed out by proscriptions, the innumerable statues of the old republicans insultingly thrown down and trampled on by tyranny; let his fancy go yet one step further, and picture Brutus's thoughts busy with home; there, in that room, are Servilia and Portia—the mother and the wife of Brutus—petrified at the entrance of a blood-stained messenger, who announces to them the news——

There is torture in pursuing this thought to its conclusion. Let us turn our eyes towards Philippi. Here is Brutus on this rocky eminence, surrounded by his friends, who are anxiously marking the fires of the hostile camp, and listening to the tramp of steeds scouring the plain in

all directions in search of them. He is calm even at this moment—he steps aside with Strato—a sword gleams between them—he has fallen!

Something like this must be imagined, if we would form any conception of the end of this great and good man. Plutarch has painted the scene with his usual simplicity; and perhaps his description was never read without tears. His noble prose has been transmuted into poetry by Shakspeare, who, although loose in his political notions, did yet admire the virtue of Brutus, and has put his opinion of him into the mouth of Antony:

This was the noblest Roman of them all;  
All the conspirators, save only he,  
Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar;  
He only, in a general honest thought,  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up,  
And say to all the world—"THIS WAS A MAN!"



THEORY.





## CHAP. XIII.

### THEORY.

IF learning be ever productive of happiness, it is when connected with the habit of theorizing ; for under the guidance of this habit, a man discovers in almost every thing a verification of his system ; while those objects or combinations which make against him he is expert at removing to a great distance, and, consequently, reducing to almost nothing. He of course consults reason in the constructive part of his labour ; but, because that is fallible, his system will have errors ; and to bend and shape facts to support these, is the work of passion. The whole man, therefore, is thrown into an easy current, which produces no counter ones ; and to move in this is to be happy. It is common enough to ridicule minds of this description, but, I fear, not quite so common to understand them ; for theory, in some shape or other, has been the " hobby-horse " of the greatest and best of men. It requires no ordinary reach, indeed, to

frame a system of any thing that shall stand the test even of ordinary examination; for, be the principles ever so sound, and ever so harmonious among themselves, one flaw in the mould which they must be cast in, to be made palpable to common apprehensions, is sufficient to draw upon their author the reprehension of the usual judges of such things.

Every man is inwardly theoretical and positive; and it is because philosophical systems break or turn into a new direction his little particular current, that he sometimes becomes disposed to pick them to pieces. They are good so long as no interest or vanity of his is disturbed by their influence. But, it seems a circumstance to be regretted, that a pre-formed taste, or a prevalent fashion, should suspend a veil between the young inquirer after truth, and those forms of intellect which reside nearest the *adyta* of her fane. The man of exalted theory is to the sceptic, what a jeweller, having his gems laid out in order in his shop, is to a man with an equal quantity huddled up in a wallet on his back. The shop is worth something. Theory has, besides, a kind of generative principle within itself, for it puts ideas, if one may so speak, into a state of fermentation, and extracts a new spirit from their union; whereas scepticism keeps its perceptions in a

cold and unprolific separation, and though they should be brilliant as the stars, they would also be as unproductive. But theory, like the principle of attraction, tends constantly to unity and proportion, and whoever wishes to see the utmost splendour of the human imagination, must seek for it in the writings of systematic philosophers. This, it is true, has been converted into blame ; but let it be remembered, that by these men imagination has been used only as a lamp to light up the deep recesses of an obscure palace, for such is nature.

It appears from what has been said, that theory is something more than a mere casket to exhibit truth in ; though men fashion it, of necessity, according to the greater or less capacity of their minds. It is in all cases, however, productive of considerable good. It exercises invention, and invigorates the discriminating powers. It induces a habit of circumspection, lest a man make the "latter part of his commonwealth contradict the beginning," and accustoms the mind to follow its ideas to their remotest consequences, that objections may be foreseen and provided against. The greatest apparent inconvenience resulting from it is dogmatism. But a man is always positive in proportion to the vividness of his conceptions ; and it is only those whose

bluntness of perception prevents their arriving at clear ideas of any thing, who linger between truth and falsehood, in that state which is commonly called being open to conviction. To be sceptical, is to be persuaded of the doubtfulness of every thing; and this persuasion may be accompanied by as much dogmatism as its opposite. The framer or supporter of a system has always one advantage, he is sure to be more contented with himself, because it is essentially more pleasing to build than to destroy. Spinoza was a striking example of this. His opinions were more erroneous, less consolatory in every sense, even than those of Pyrrho himself; but the delight arising from following the path of what he supposed to be truth, through the whole dominion of nature, rendered him insensible to the charms of all ordinary pleasures; and probably made him partaker of as high a degree of that serene felicity which merits the name of happiness, as it is in the power of literature to bestow. His speculations united him, as it were, with nature; and her constancy and sameness lent simplicity and equability to his mind.

The man without a system, of some kind or another, is a mariner without a chart: he is at the mercy of the winds and waves. In such a man paradox, or, occasionally, a little contradic-

tion, is a venial fault. He attempts to build with unhewn stones and without cement; and thus rents and roughnesses are unavoidable. What is worse, he cannot avoid the having favourite notions, though disclaiming a favourite *set*; and generally wears them, as the old knights did their mistresses' favours, in his hat, to challenge essay of prowess. The small sceptic feels the objects around him escape the grasp of his mind, and can never drive them into a *cul de sac* where they must at length turn round and be taken. He lives in a land of shadows in which every thing seems disposed to elude being known—he struggles with indistinct forms—he becomes weary without becoming wise—and at length determines to lie still and suffer the phantoms to mock him as they please. But this is a state of inward agony—a feeling of the absolute nothingness of life. How much better is it to erect a mound upon which speculation may sit above the common atmosphere of error! though, occasionally, a cloud may mount and stain the purity of the prospect—*Hic labor, hoc opus est!*

To have a system, is to have an everlasting spur to thought, an aim to which you tend “through evil and through good report,” it is this which raises a shaking among the dry bones of knowledge; which gathers together principles; turns

up the soil of the mind, and implants those healthy and vigorous shoots of thought, beneath which happiness delights to recline. It suffers no stagnation in the stream of life, no branching off of minor rivulets into useless channels, but, drawing all into one broad bed, creates a deep and fertilizing river, of what otherwise might have putrefied in a morass.

**LITERARY NECROMANCY.**







## CHAP. XIV.

### LITERARY NECROMANCY.

SOME writers are born for the amusement of their own age, which, in vanishing, carries off their works along with it. They are trees whose roots descend no further than the vegetable mould, being too weak, or too fond of the warm surface, to strike down among the rocks and ribs of the earth. To attempt to revive such writers, when their day is past, is turning the handle of time the wrong way. They were never meant for posterity.

That those who write for the public should provide as fully as possible for their entertainment, must of course be admitted; but it is not unreasonable to expect that an author should, at the same time, have an eye to fame and posterity. The latter, in fact, is the true liege lord of the children of the Muses. But, dwelling at a distance, he cannot be present at the christening of his subjects, or witness the sports of their

infancy. Those who would reach his court must strengthen their constitutions by exercise and diet, and live to the age of manhood. It were a poor compliment to the discernment of our own times to suppose that we are incapable of relishing what after ages shall admire : but an author unquestionably may too exclusively regard the taste of his contemporaries. It does not necessarily follow that what pleases now, shall always please, though the presumption is that it may.

Those books are of course neglected which treat of subjects not generally interesting to mankind ; which pick up the scraps and leavings of genius that they may seem to contain what even great men had failed to reach : their authors not distinguishing between overlooking, and purposely passing by. The exposition of peculiar tenets of theology, the portraiture of some transient modification of manners, even the treating of important subjects after some corrupt fashion, generated by circumstances, are necessarily inductive of oblivion : and this, though the authors be men of capacity, for men of inferior powers naturally sink into neglect, be their works conversant about what they may. It is in vain to think to remedy, by artifices of style, the inherent aversion of some subjects to longevity ; the world has never yet bestowed immortality upon any performance

merely on account of its rhetorical ornaments. Men in fact know their own interests too well to be guilty of this. They pardon a plain man the roughness of his expressions, if they are able to perceive the light of a great understanding flashing up from among them ; from the same principle that they prefer travelling through the most rugged country which is rich in extraordinary natural objects, to rolling along over a smooth way, whose sole recommendation arises from its own excellent structure.

To a man of sensibility, it is painful to reflect how many ingenious volumes which now circulate from hand to hand through the community must, ere long, go the way of all paper and ink, and be seen no more for ever. The flashes of wit which now appear so discoverable in their pages, the pestilent breath of time will totally extinguish, leaving nothing but a *caput mortuum* that shall weigh them down *ad plures*. Their authors, now wafted about on the breath of popularity, must themselves, alas ! submit to his scythe, making way for some monastic scholar, perhaps, whom, in the day of their prosperity, they treated as a mere day-labourer of the Muses.

Make a list (if the thing be possible) of the obscure books which constitute the lifeless body of our public libraries ; examine their subjects ;

inquire into the history of their publication, and you will find that such of them as are the productions of men of talent, treat of things which it is the interest of no human being to understand—that, notwithstanding, their authors were pressed by numerous friends to favour the world with the results of their studies—that the books ran through two or three editions—that the idle portion of mankind, who alone look into such works, were shortly drawn off by new ones of the same kind, and that then these laborious publications sunk at once and for ever. Such has been and such must be the fate of all books of the kind. In the common conversation of most families there are peculiar expressions, intelligible enough among themselves, which no one out of the pale of their circle could translate into common sense. Nations are large families, and have a language and mode of thinking so exclusively their own, that it is not sense beyond their frontiers; and this, altering with the alterations of times and circumstances, becomes obsolete at the next shifting of the scene. The author who makes such peculiarities the mine of his observations, and often seems the deepest looker into human nature to his intimates and friends, from their mistaking a small variety for the whole species, goes out of date with his age, and no efforts of critics, or others, can

preserve him. This temporary fashion is a kind of cross current over the great tide of time, occasioned by some chance wind, which ceasing to blow, the waters take their usual way, and those barks which were built only to sail in it necessarily overturn and sink.

To interest posterity, and gain a lasting reputation, an author must grapple with the permanent passions of his species. The human heart is a deep slough, and he who stands finicking about the brink, afraid of soiling his shoes, will make no hand of it. We have a natural aversion to see a palace built merely for a spider to spin its web in; and it is little better when, within the vast enclosures of long and high sounding periods, we perceive a few naked ideas flitting to and fro as if lost in a labyrinth. If man be an old subject he is at least a lasting and inexhaustible one, and still includes much *terra incognita* in his make. But these lands, must be sought by a sparing light, through long and intricate ways. There is no setting up a traffic with or subduing them in a few weeks, and retailing in a kind of haberdasher's shop their *opima spolia* reeking from the field of victory. Men can get no buyers who come out into the streets with one truth in their hands at a time, because the public suspect they did not come honestly by it. They must lay out their

ideas in order, if they would have credit for being the original proprietors, and suffer us to examine them leisurely, out of their own dark shop.

Writers have sometimes condemned themselves to obscurity by attempting to cut down the human mind to fit some hastily constructed theory. Many of these have moreover been persons of strong intellect, unhappily led astray by following the *ignis fatuus* light of some phantom of originality. They were hewing, however, at an indiscernible substance, which, like the body of Satan, suffered their sword to pass through it and closed again. There is no gaining a real immortality but by taking and describing man as he is. The various disguises he may put on, wear out, or are exchanged for others; he himself remaining beneath every mask eternally the same. Like a lover in masquerade, too, he secretly prefers those who know him in all his changes; and think it a breach of affection to offer up adoration to any fictitious physiognomy which for some purpose or other he may have been driven to assume. In like manner satire is a perishable subject, unless directed against the inherent vices of the human character. Horace and Juvenal will never cease to be read, but the *Dunciad* might already be cut out of the works of Pope without great detriment. Even *Hudibras* is much more spoken of than read.

But of all causes that make works the property of forgetfulness, there is not one more effective than affectation of originality. It is a formal bidding adieu to nature. For under the influence of so unhappy a propensity, a writer no longer feels himself at liberty to say any thing in the usual way. It were to forfeit his claim to consideration. His mind, in the perpetual orgasm of novelty, becomes unsettled and fidgetty; and he follows common sense about like an old slippered duenna keeping watch on a wild heiress, lest it should form some acquaintance with the ways of men. He must not take up the old distinctions between right and wrong, because they are common-place, and excite no wonder. It is not his business to put established principles in motion for the production of some new result. He takes nature in hand as if she might be divided piecemeal; and for the sake of newness attempts to tie discordant parts together. He has no conception that the continuity of her operations cannot be broken; that though noiseless and mild, they are inevitable; that all we can do is faithfully to set forth what is, never dreaming of erecting a paltry dyke for the purpose of staying or turning off the irresistible march of causes and effects. We are bound however to the wheel of nature, and though it should roll over us, we must still cling



to it. But the knight-errant of originality understands nothing of all this. He labours at his subject with eyes closed to all common beauties, hailing with the enthusiasm of a soothsayer, every strange or uncouth idea that rises above the plane of his mind. Like a swimmer who is to gain some certain point, he dashes through crowding similes and metaphors, till he touches upon the extreme verge of resemblance; and imagining this proceeding to be under the guidance of wit, fills his quiver with the points and shafts of arrows, throwing away the reed as vulgar and burdensome. The barb however will not fly without a body to any certain aim; but as he pours forth his riches, having no weight, they are taken up by the storm, and scattered to all the winds of heaven.

A writer of this species should make up his mind to become obscure in a very few years. After ages can have no clue to the dark genesis of his thoughts, but would be reduced to guess at their import as if they were so many Delphian oracles. Were they worth interpreting, this labour might be undertaken cheerfully; but how can a mind, intent upon nothing but strangeness, work out any reasonable proposition? C—— is one of those writers. His mind is a glowing furnace, but he has stretched the dark canvass of sophistry between it and mankind, through the breaks of



which a few flashes of light burst forth occasionally. Some few of his productions may live, and preserve his name; but the mass of his works will drop into the obscurity where now repose the volumes of Quarles, Withers, and Daniel. P—— is another. His imagination is artificial, slow, and observing. There is not enough of fire in it to melt down his metaphors, so as that they may receive the stamp of his mind; or to light our way through the heavy march of his sentences, or to form a will-o'-the-wisp, which by flitting before us in our path, might cheat us on to the end of it. One feels himself in the Slough of Despond on entering upon his pages. The further we proceed, the deeper and more perplexed we find ourselves. When going about in search of a new idea, he resembles Diogenes with his lantern; it escapes from him through crowds of every-day notions; he plunges after it; he seizes on something like it by mistake. Who in labouring through the productions of such a writer can feel delight, or admiration, or enthusiasm? Who can ever return to them as he returns to a pleasing path which he has once wandered through, to renew an acquaintance with objects either fertile in charming associations, or calculated to call forth the fancy on her winged journies?

It is hard however, to distinguish between an extensive popularity and a fame begun. Mr. Shelley was not, during his life, a popular writer ; nor are his works calculated, independently of the erroneous opinions they contain, ever to become popular ; but he has purchased a freehold in the territory of the Muses which neither time nor critics will ever be able to separate from his name. Whatever may be said, it is impossible to credit that his singularity was the effect of affectation, and not rather the aberration of a spirit drenched in enthusiasm, and fluctuating with the impulses of extraordinary feeling. He threw himself into the course to run with nature to the extremity of her race, and it is no wonder that, amidst the whirling dust of this Olympic contest, he sometimes forgot the charioteer. It may be also, that seeing men shot with poisoned arrows from high places, he, through a spirit of contradiction, betook himself to casting back their own weapons at the archers. Let his errors be exposed, while his motives are respected, and his genius honoured and cherished. He is not an obscure writer, though only now beginning to be read ; and forms a striking contrast with those who are fated to become the prey of oblivion. Undoubtedly he did not see his way with sufficient clearness through the incumbent swarms of his

weighty thoughts, and sometimes raised, like a daring necromancer, more active principles than he could afterwards reduce to order ; but this did not happen because his mind was weak, but because nature is too strong for any mind, and will not have her secrets wrested from her by the bold impiety of mortals. The reader does not, however, go from his works with a conviction that he has seen through the whole texture of them. He is led to ponder upon principles. His reason and his judgment are sharpened to come again to the onset, and he is seldom cheated with a shadow. What if Mr. Shelley's conclusions be often wrong, and induce false notions of some of the most sacred things about which the human mind is conversant ? We do not read to borrow opinions, but to weigh and examine them ; to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." Many writers are free from such errors only because they have never turned up the soil in which they lie jumbled with their correspondent truths ; the dross and the metal interveined, and almost undistinguishable. Lucretius and Aristotle are thought harmless enough now, yet are more instructive than when they were implicitly believed in.

Among our old writers, the obsolete and forgotten, as well as the illustrious, we commonly

find a free vein of scholarship mitigating the strong acerbity of their nature. But in the former there is an essential deficiency in point of taste. Their speculations, whether high or low, are remote from human interest, or run among transient habits and fading vagaries of the mind. There is too much of the spirit of "P. P. Clerk of this Parish" in them. The degree of habitual intercourse which a man keeps up with the *great writers* of all ages, is unquestionably the least uncertain test by which to judge of his taste and discernment. He who is for ever digging, like a mole, among the obscure fields of literature, may be sure that his mind has itself a strong tendency that way. He acts by a kind of presentiment, and may be looked upon as conciliating the shades of his future associates. There is a species of fatality in one's choice of books. There is an industry which is ruinous of the mind's force and elasticity. There is a mephitic odour which exhales from some of them, that disturbs and stupifies the brain. I have at this moment before me the "Psychozioa" of Dr. Henry More, as good a specimen perhaps of laborious dulness as could be mentioned. Here scholarship and deep, or rather bottomless, speculation concur to drive away every shadow of meaning. Yet did the author assume airs of importance, predicating as a certainty that he should

not be blamed by "any thing but ignorance and malignity." Blamed ! he hoped to be read then ! Let the most unlettered hind in the kingdom rejoice in his ignorance, for he has a mind more clearly human than the compiler of such absurdities as are contained in this book ; as the reader, who attempts to discover the meaning of the following passage from the doctor's preface, will, I think, acknowledge.

" This first book, (says he,) as you may judge by the names therein, was intended for a mere Platonical description of Universal Life, or life that is omnipresent though not alike omnipresent. As in Noah's Deluge, the water that overflowed the earth was present in every part thereof, but every part of the water was not in every part of the earth or all in every part ; so the low spirit of the universe, though it go quite through the world, yet it is not totally in every part of the world, else we should hear our antipodes if they did but whisper. Because our lower man is a part of the inferior Spirit of the Universe."

And is the world to be blamed for neglecting such productions as this ? It is for the honour of human nature that they should be forgotten ; and numberless are the works which our worthy ancestors have left us in the same strain. England, indeed, and Germany appear to have been

the chief nurseries of these professors of the bathos. Among us, however, the race is nearly extinct, nor would it be easy to revive it; for, whatever may be said to our disparagement, we can not now be very much amused by any thing which we do not in some measure understand. Unmindful of this, some of our contemporaries seem to harbour a design of reanimating these skeletons of antiquity. But it is as barbarous as it is impolitic to drag out such rude memorials of human weakness from beneath the accumulated oblivion of ages, to expose them to the scorn of the acuter intellects of these times. It is endeavouring to transform an annual into a perennial flower. It is taking the peaceful dead out of their coffins, to expose them to the fierce passions of the living, by attempting to drive the latter out of their places for their reception. It is unjust. In the journal of time they have written their tale, and though their leaves are now closed, they have no right to usurp upon the small portion allotted to us. The wind of eternity, blowing but one way, can never suffer those pages which it has closed to be opened again. We must read them as they flutter past us, and inscribe what we have to say rapidly, that we may give place to others. Fame keeps her roll apart, and eternally open; but it is by no means free to all. Her children are a privileged order;

and though she sometimes seems to judge by proxy, like the Roman senate, she disclaims her instruments, if the affair prove not to her taste. The conductress to fame is Art, which is never decried by those who have genius enough to make use of it. Art is the key which unlocks the treasures of genius; but when a man has only an empty chest, he may well laugh at locks and keys. Among obsolete and obscure writers, nine out of every ten were eccentric contemners of art. Men who trusted that a kind of blind instinct, taking the lead among their perceptions, would operate its effect by a species of plastic power. But if man was from the first doomed not to reach simple bread, unless by the sweat of his brow, how can he expect that he shall be able, without vast art and labour, to bind up his thoughts into a frame that may be co-lasting with nature herself? It may be well enough for the present to pour forth our ideas in the newest fashion; like pancakes, they may require to be eaten hot. But I should like to see Fame's Index Expurgatorius for this century: she would make strange havoc, I am afraid, of our immortality. We go out unarmed to war with Time, or carry only the sling and stone of fancy; but if our first blow miss, we are undone. The giant rushes on with his scythe, mows us down like grass, and



then tramples us under his feet. Those who have led him captive at their triumphal car, used far other arts. They came to the trial in impenetrable armour, close as the scales of the crocodile, and were able to keep pace with the swift steeds of their enemy. Contemning the treachery of their own camp, they came off with victory; and those who at their out-goings strewed thorns and brambles in their way, have been known to weave a chaplet to adorn their brows at their return. Success is the test of a man's merit to little minds — his deservings are like water sprinkled on the sand.

END OF VOL. I.

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